Ageing in the city:
geographies of social interactions and everyday life

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Abstract

The ageing of the population in the United Kingdom poses urgent challenges to urban policy and planning committed to create accessible and inclusive public spaces. Issues of accessibility of outdoor environments have been addressed extensively in terms of design and service provision. However, the same attention has not been paid to more intangible factors related to older people's personal experiences of navigating the built environment. In particular, everyday encounters and social interactions between older people and other users of public spaces have been identified in policy and academic research as significant in influencing the usability of places, but there has been far less engagement with how these interactions actually unfold. The gap is addressed in this thesis through the investigation of older people's social experiences as they navigate the urban environment. Research subjects provided nuanced interpretations of outdoor sociability. The research demonstrates that sociability manifests in different ways, not all of which are positive. Older people's everyday life is explored in the thesis by relating sociability to mobility, recreational activities and perceptions of the urban landscape. In this way the research addresses the knowledge gap into the ways in which older people spend their time outdoors and on the physical and social features of cities that they do or do not enjoy. This research problematises issues of urban sociability that are often overlooked in policy discourses on sustainable communities and inclusive public spaces and it deepens our understanding of older people's day-to-day life outdoors. This is of significant importance if we want to advance our knowledge on how to enhance quality of life in old age through informed policy and practice. The research contributes also to geographers' engagement with innovative research methods, as it develops a mixed-methods approach that combines ethnographic investigation with mobile and visual data.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This research aims to investigate older people's everyday sociability in urban public and semi-public spaces, with particular attention to unstructured social encounters. A number of studies in gerontology, geography, urban design and in policy have recognised social encounters outdoors as a significant factor in enhancing older people's quality of life and in determining the usability of public spaces in old age (e.g. Burton & Mitchell 2006; CABE 2008; Clifton 2011; Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2004; ODPM 2006; Risser et al. 2010; Sauter & Huettenmoser 2008). In addition, research demonstrates that social interactions and sociable activities have a positive impact on older people's life satisfaction and quality of life, on sense of community and strength of ties among neighbours, while reducing the chance of depression and dementia (cf. Sugiyama et al. 2009, p.5). Although the abovementioned works recognise the importance of outdoor social interaction in later life, their main focus is on issues of accessibility of outdoor environments mostly in terms of design and service provision. Indeed, in so doing these studies show the significant role played by the urban layout in encouraging people to mix, enjoy and rub along in public spaces, and find that good design appears to support individuals' positive experiences of public spaces.

This research argues that, in addition to analyses of physical features of the urban environment, a specific focus on sociability in public spaces is important to understand how to move towards age-friendly and inclusive societies. Such a focus is also significant in advancing our understanding of the ways in which older people spend their time outdoors in urban areas, with whom and why. Detailed knowledge on older people's outdoor patterns can be used to promote positive practice in planning aimed to support activity and mobility (Sugiyama & Thompson 2007). With academics and planners committed to create cities that encourage conviviality and encounter (Bell 2007; Fincher & Iveson 2008) and with population ageing in most countries, it is essential to take a closer look at the ways in which older people live their sociability outdoors and at the nuances of what sociability means to them. So far, research that addresses issues around sociability of older people has tended to investigate social relationships with neighbours, friends, relatives, and mostly in the local environment (Oswald et al. 2005; Phillips et al. 2005; Yen et al. 2010). In so doing, it has overlooked a

whole spectrum of impromptu social interactions that occur on a day-to-day basis both in the local area and on a wider geographical scale and which are of great significance in determining the quality of individuals' outdoor experiences.

In light of this premise, this study addresses the following research questions:

1) In which ways do encounters and interactions with other people influence older people's experiences of navigating urban public spaces?

2) In which ways do older people embody, reinterpret or resist dominant messages about ageing through their everyday social interactions in public and semi-public places?

3) In which ways are people's social interactions and mobility patterns influenced by age?

4) In which ways do urban public spaces mediate older people's social encounters?

The shift of focus of research in the field of ageing and the environment defines the originality of these research questions. Specifically, rather than looking at accessibility of places in terms of layout and physical barriers, these questions investigate outdoor human interaction as a potential support or obstacle to accessibility of places in old age. In so doing, the four questions address issues of conviviality and liveability of urban spaces in later life from a perspective that has received far less attention in gerontological and geographical research. Despite the scarce attention, social interactions, people's attitudes towards older people, and older people's perceptions of others' behaviours are just as important as physical features in determining the extent to which an outdoor experience is enjoyable (Biggs & Tinker 2007).

This research investigates sociability in relation to everyday life and outdoor mobility, with the ultimate goal to offer scope for reflection to policymakers and practitioners concerned with sustainable communities and inclusive design. Policy often ignores the nuances of urban sociability and underestimates or misinterprets the role played by social interactions in determining people's experiences of public spaces. The research recognises that policymakers may find it difficult to assimilate the subjectivity and multiplicity of outdoor social experiences into their policy designs (Middleton 2010). Nonetheless, the study intends to offer invaluable insights to some of the urban policies that embrace social objectives of inclusion and equality in their designs. The strength of this research is the direct involvement

of older people in the investigation of sociability in urban areas, both in the phase of design of the research methods and the phase of data collection. Their involvement represents a very important feature of this project because it provides primary data that may contribute to policy development.

As Chapter 3 will discuss in more detail, *older people* in this study have been identified as people over 60 years of age. In addition, the research draws on Simmel's (1949) sociological definition of *sociability* as the different forms of social interaction that manifest in public places. More precisely, Simmel sees sociability as an impulse of human nature and argues that forms of association among individuals imply that "the solitariness of the individual is resolved into togetherness, a union with others" (p.255). Simmel emphasises the playful and joyful aspects of sociability and stresses the "free-playing, interacting interdependence of individuals" (p.255). His discussion of sociability depicts deliberately an ideal society where individual impulsiveness, aggressiveness and ego are minimised and where "amiability, breeding, cordiality, and attractiveness of all kinds determine the character of purely sociable association" (p.255). Although this research embraces the playful and stimulating characterisation of sociability, it recognises that social interactions in public places are not always of a kind nature but rather they present a more nuanced character. Sociability of older people is explored both within and outside the neighbourhood of residence away from domestic spaces. This study adopts a broad definition of *public place* and *outdoor space* as any urban space beyond the individual's private premises. Therefore, the definition includes all those transitory public spaces and privately-owned public places that are part of people's day-to-day life outdoors, such as cafés, greengrocers, libraries, banks, post offices, bus stops, stations as well as cultural and recreational places such as leisure centres, museums, galleries, theatres and cinemas (Gardner 2011; Kirby 2008; Oldenburg 1989). The exploration has not been limited to a specific kind of place but it includes the variety of amenities that emerged from participants' narratives during the course of the fieldwork. The abovementioned outdoor places have attracted minor attention among scientific research in comparison to housing and neighbourhood environments (see Phillips et al. 2013). Nevertheless, their examination is of absolute importance in studies of quality of life in later life, given that a large proportion of the older population accesses these places on a daily basis, which contribute to the vibrancy that characterises urban public spaces.

Contribution to knowledge

The relevance of this study lies in its attempts to engage with issues of urban sociability at a micro-level through the exploration of older people's lived experiences and practices outdoors. Definitions of *social interactions* and *sociability* have emerged from participants' narratives to shed light on how these concepts are interpreted and experienced by the research subjects. In so doing, experiential evidence gathered during the fieldwork is combined with influential geographical and gerontological literature. This study advances our knowledge on issues related to older people's quality of life in urban areas with a specific focus on the ways in which urban public and semi-public places hinder and/or encourage wellbeing in later life. As part of the analysis, issues of mobility, transportation and preferences of places visited are examined in relation to different variables, e.g. age and gender. The research was carried out in two British urban environments and as such it aims to advance understandings of conviviality and everydayness in public spaces specific to the British social and cultural context. Lastly, the study aims to contribute to methodological approaches that adopt visual and mobile methods in geographic research, as it develops an innovative mixed-methods approach that combines in-depth semi-structured interviews with GPS tracking, participatory photography and researcher-accompanied journeys (also called "go-alongs").

The ageing process – broader context

The ageing of the population that is taking place nationally and internationally substantiates the relevance of this research. Indeed, population ageing has become a prominent phenomenon on a global scale, and people aged 60 and over worldwide represent the fastest growing age group of the global population (National Institute on Aging & World Health Organization 2011). In more detail, the number of this group as a proportion of the global population is expected to double from 11% in 2006 to 22% in 2025, exceeding by that time the number of children between 0 and 14 years old (World Health Organization 2007). At the time of writing, the older population in the United Kingdom (UK) is expected to increase from 15% in 1985 to 23% by 2035 (Office for National Statistics 2012). Similar to other European

countries and America, the current greying of the population in the UK is the result of the high fertility rates that characterised the aftermath of World War II, from 1946 until the mid-1960s.

Increased life expectancy means higher opportunities to live healthier lives in old age. The baby-boomers who were born between the 1940s and the 1960s are now in their 50s and 60s years of age, and many of them will soon reach their 70s in better health conditions compared to older people of just a few decades ago. As a consequence of enhanced health – certainly depending on individual circumstances – later life can be a time of enjoyment and personal satisfaction. For example, it may offer more opportunities to be active, to engage in new hobbies, in volunteering and to participate in civic life. Moreover, better health conditions may enable older people to maintain independence for longer, which is significant because being independent is important in the satisfaction of everyday needs and consequently it impacts people's quality of life (Gabriel & Bowling, 2004). Due to these opportunities, it has been argued that major changes in lifestyle appear to have taken place among older people over the last couple of decades (Wahl et al. 2007). For example, older people nowadays are more mobile, more confident in travelling for pleasure both nationally and internationally. They are also more flexible and more socially and culturally aware of their roles and power in society (Wahl et al. 2007). Since an increasing number of people above 60 years old is expected to live rather healthy and active lives in the next future, it is important to investigate the ways in which this growing group of the population experiences the urban context and how such a context supports or hinders their wellbeing. Therefore, older people who are capable to navigate the public realm and undertake basic everyday tasks without the assistance of other people compose the sample of this research. Indeed, this study recognises also that the ageing process can be a very different experience for individuals suffering forms of disadvantage. For example, limited finances and poor health may temper personal opportunities to lead an active and socially engaged later life. The demographic change represents a core and challenging issue for governments and decision-makers especially around issues of health care and social policy. However, this study introduces a focus of research on the promising possibilities that increased life expectancy might bring to individuals.

In particular, this research aims to explore how urban environments could assist older people to live a fulfilling and independent old age. Over the last decade there has been increasing

interest in urban themes among studies in gerontology, which led authors to talk about a "new environmental gerontology" (Phillipson 2004) that focuses precisely on urbanisation and urban areas:

> "[t]his emphasis on the urban itself reflects the interaction between the trend towards the spatial concentration of populations (with 60% of the world's population living in cities by 2030) and the impact upon cities of demographic ageing." (Phillipson & Scharf 2005, p.70)

Demographic data not only show that three out of five people in the world will live in cities by 2030, but also that an increasing number of older people in developed countries live in cities already, with proportions that match those of younger age groups at about 80% (World Health Organization 2007). Official data specify that between 2001 and 2011 the proportion of the UK rural population aged between 60 to 74 years old increased by 4.1% while in urban areas the increase was of 0.8% for the same age group (Office for National Statistics 2013). Yet, a significant number of older people live in urban environments and this is expected to rise over the next few years as the "baby boomers" grow older. Later life in urban environments can be challenging because of a range of physical and psychological barriers, for example in terms of accessibility of places, delivery of services, mobility opportunities and perception of safety. Scharf et al. (2005) argue that although urban areas can be oppressing at any age, the extent to which cities can be disabling and threatening appears to intensify with age. In light of that, Phillipson and Scharf (2005) suggest that one priority of research on ageing should be the investigation of the ways in which the urban environment affects the everyday life of older people, with the aim to reduce potential barriers. This is particularly important for what concerns neighbourhoods and local areas, within which many older people tend to spend a significant amount of their daily time. However, it is important to stress that older people would not be the only ones who might benefit from improved design of urban areas, because:

> "age per se is not the only issue, as an urban environment that is friendly for older people is also likely to be suitable for other age groups, too. Therefore, careful environmental design will benefit all citizens." (Phillips et al. 2005, p.147)

Outline of the thesis

The thesis is structured in 6 chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature and is divided in four sections. The first introduces the concept of *old age* within academic and policy research and discusses relevant issues concerning the ageing process. The following section outlines the most influential theories of ageing that focus on the role of social and physical contexts on older people's quality of life. Then, it reviews the empirical literature exploring the relationships between older people's quality of life and the outdoor environment. Lastly, Chapter 2 discusses existing studies that specifically explore issues of conviviality, encounter and sociability in urban areas, with particular attention to the impact of outdoor sociability on older people's wellbeing.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods in detail. It begins with a review of the literature on the *new mobilities paradigm* and the mobile methods, to continue with an extensive description of the pilot study and of the main phase of data collection. Both descriptions include details regarding fieldwork locations, recruitment process, research methods, and critical analyses that address strengths and limitations of the methods adopted.

Chapter 4 is the first of three analytical chapters and provides a statistical exploration of the quantitative data collected, combined with the analysis of related qualitative data. This chapter includes information on the frequency of participants' outings during an ordinary week, the places visited, the patterns of mobility and the transportation used. It sets up the context for the analysis developed in Chapters 5 and 6, which are based only on qualitative data. Research question 3 is addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 sheds light on older people's experiences of everyday sociability in urban areas. As part of their daily journeys, older people engage in social interaction of a different nature, i.e. unplanned interactions with strangers, with commercial/service purposes and also regular encounters with "familiar strangers" (Paulos & Goodman 2004).[1] This chapter addresses research questions 1 and 2 by drawing on the qualitative data gathered for the study. The first

1. Paulos and Goodman (2004) define familiar strangers as "individuals that we regularly observe but do not interact with. By definition a Familiar Stranger (1) must be observed, (2) repeatedly, and (3) without any interaction. The claim is that the relationship we have with these Familiar Strangers is indeed a real relationship in which both parties agree to mutually ignore each other, without any implications of hostility" (p.223).

section of the chapter explores the ways in which respondents conceive sociability and social interactions, and it investigates whether and how different places and situations lead to experience diverse types of interactions. The second section considers ageist attitudes that older people face during their everyday outings and addresses participants' reactions to such stereotypes.

Chapter 6 explores the ways in which older people perceive and use the urban landscape. It addresses research question 4 by looking at how older people link design of public places to social interactions. The first section examines specifically the interrelations between urban design and sociability of public places. The second section considers issues around accomplishment of everyday tasks and leisure in public places by examining the physical elements that support or hinder such activities. These aspects are considered because they emerged as pivotal in subjects' accounts of personal experiences in urban areas.

Chapter 7 draws conclusions by confronting the empirical results of this research against existing theories and evidence in the literature. In addition, it stresses the policy relevance of the research findings. It also underlines the limitations of the study and provides suggestions for further research on specific areas that remain insufficiently explored.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

The investigation of older people's sociability in the city requires the consideration of literatures from a spectrum of research fields. More precisely, this study engages with recent geographical and sociological work on urban sociability and encounters, and with literature in geography and gerontology on mobility, quality of life, urban design and accessibility of public places in later life. The combined analysis of these bodies of literature is essential in the development of a comprehensive exploration of the relationships between older people's wellbeing, their use of outdoor environment and the conviviality of urban public places, as such issues are interrelated with each other. In light of this, the review is structured as a logical passage from general debates around later life to more specific issues around conviviality of cities and sociability in old age. Precisely, the review starts by considering debates around meanings of *old age* and seminal theories about later life and the environment. The section highlights the complexity behind definitions and understandings of old age, setting the context for the subsequent discussion of studies on older people's accessibility to and use of outdoor environments. Then, literature on sociability in outdoor urban areas is discussed, and the review concludes by looking at relevant works on the outdoor sociability of older people. The literature review draws from a variety of theories and concepts, and this clearly reflects the multidisciplinarity of the research topic. This decision was taken because adopting one of the theoretical approaches available in the gerontological literature would not have suited the research objectives perfectly. Hence, it was decided to develop theoretical conceptualisations by analysing the primary data without restricting it to a single theoretical approach.

The conceptualisation of old age in policy and research

Over the last decade old age has undergone a structural and conceptual transformation mainly due to demographic change, increased life expectancy, major changes in lifestyle and improved quality of life (Mansvelt 2008; Wahl et al. 2007). These factors have contributed to

the redefinition of the concept of *ageing* in new forms that reflect historical, cultural and social changes in societies, where adult life-stage boundaries have become increasingly blurred and old age is perceived less as a period of inexorable decline (Biggs et al. 2006). Policy discourses often encapsulate this shift to new forms of ageing by overlooking essential differences between later life and previous life phases, for example promoting images of older people as participative subjects in civic life and governance, as active and "youthful" individuals, or valuing their role as consumers who can still influence market choices (Department for Work and Pensions 2005; ODPM 2006a; Open Space Research Centre 2011). *Active ageing* is now encouraged as the desirable lifestyle and it is promoted to encourage the social inclusion of older population. As an example, 2012 was designated by the Council of the European Union as "Year for active ageing and solidarity between generations" (European Commission 2010). Thereby, it has been argued that social policy homogenises the healthcare needs of people of different ages, overlooking the diversity of needs specific to different life phases and undermining the societal recognition of physical and mental decline that occurs inevitably with age (Biggs et al. 2006, p.244). In addition, it has been emphasised how older people are increasingly treated as a target market for goods and services. An example of this is McHugh's (2000) analysis of the retirement industry in Arizona and the intrinsic ageist strategies to attract older people through the promotion of desirable and attractive images of old age. The stress on older people's involvement in local governance can be seen also as part of the overall policy objective of creating sustainable communities, which has been criticised by some authors as a way to devolve governments' responsibilities to local communities without actually empowering them (Clark 2005; Levitas 2000). For example, this inclination is evident in the policy paper *Opportunity Age* (Department for Work and Pensions 2005), which claims that:

> "the primary responsibility for keeping active and participating in society lies with older people themselves. Central government and local authorities need to work with them to help unlock the even greater potential that exists for them to contribute." (p.30)

Similarly, with regard to this document Biggs et al. (2006) argue that people over 50 years of age are incentivised to work and to undertake work-like activities such as volunteering after retirement as a way to encourage social inclusion and personal satisfaction. However, by arguing that "in so doing, the 'burden' of too many pensioners and too few workers is turned

into a virtuous circle of greater numbers of older tax paying workers and fewer pensioner claimants" (p.243), the authors seem to suggest that such encouragement is motivated mostly by economic rationales. The concept of *sustainable communities* integrates social, economic and political issues into a spatial dimension. As described by the government's paper *Sustainable Communities: People, Places and Prosperity* (ODPM 2005), a sustainable community should offer:

> "a sense of place (e.g. a place with a positive 'feeling' for people and local distinctiveness); user-friendly public and green spaces with facilities for everyone including children and older people (...); buildings and public spaces which promote health and are designed to reduce crime and make people feel safe; accessibility of jobs, key services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling." (p.58)

However, the reality of outdoor environments is certainly more complex and multi-layered. Issues of social exclusion, safety and inaccessibility of public spaces often characterise public areas and neighbourhoods, limiting their chances to be sustainable and socially inclusive towards older people and other age groups as well (Burton & Mitchell 2006; Day 2008; Dykstra 2009; Open Space Research Centre 2011; Phillipson & Scharf 2005; Risser et al. 2010; Scharf & Gierveld 2008; Scharf et al. 2005). In addition, since policymaking can only operate within generalising frameworks, concepts such as *user-friendly space* or characterisations of age groups like older people and children are not unpacked to explore the nuances of the relationships between place and ageing as social and spatial constructs (Mansvelt 2008). In a report designed for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Pain (2005) discusses the situation of intergenerational relations in the UK at the time of writing and provides recommendations on how to develop and implement intergenerational practice that might assist governments in achieving the goal of sustainable communities and inclusive public spaces. She contends that conflictual situations between younger and older generations are mostly over public space and these affect their social interactions, the way public spaces are used, and the opportunities to participate in public life and contribute to community life. Amongst the recommendations suggested in the report, central is the participation of younger and older people in regeneration processes, given that bottom-up practice is assumed to contribute significantly to community cohesion and to promote more sustainable outcomes.

In contrast to the generalising frameworks adopted in most policymaking, the ambiguities embedded in the definitions of *age* and *older people* within the gerontological, geographical and sociological literature are increasingly emphasised and addressed (Biggs 2005; Biggs et al. 2006; Bytheway 2005; Day & Hitchings 2011; Laz 1998; Rozario & Derienzis 2009). These authors eschew definitions of *older people* based exclusively on the chronological-biological dimension; instead, they prefer multidimensional approaches to old age and to age in general that include social and cultural factors. On one extreme, Laz (1998) has emphasised age as a social construction and has developed the framework of *age-as-accomplished* in opposition to conceptions of age as purely based on physical chronology. In her perspective, age is an act, a performance that "is not simply *shaped* by social forces; it is *constituted* in interaction and gains its meaning in interaction and in the context of larger social forces" (p.86). A less radical approach – which is embraced also by this research – is adopted by other authors who recognise the significance of social and cultural factors in shaping conceptualisations of age but caution against socio-cultural determinism when theorising about old age, as the risk is to completely ignore the actual physicality of the ageing process (Day & Hitchings 2011; Öberg & Tornstam 1999; Twigg 2007). Two prominent theories in social gerontology reflect this more nuanced view of age and ageing as a combination of physical and social forces, precisely the concept of *mask of ageing* (Featherstone et al. 1991) and of *ageless self* (Kaufman 1986). These two notions share the assumption that the body is perceived as an imprisonment of a youthful self inside an old body and they underline individuals' desire to remain young by denying old age as a distinct phase of life. The *mask of ageing* concept describes the increasing gap between an individual's inner feelings and personal identity versus an exterior body that does not reflect the inner part, which is why it becomes perceived as a mask that betrays the youthfulness of the inner self. The concept of *ageless self* refers to the maintenance of continuity in the old person's identity and subjective feelings throughout the life course and it is described as an unconscious denial of the ageing process. However, Biggs (2005) underlines that the idea of an ageless self underestimates the power of social barriers on self-expression in old age. There is no uniformity of conceptualisations among scholars for what concerns definitions of "old age", and interesting debates have taken place with regard to the whole *agelessness* idea and the ways in which it has been adopted within research (Andrews 1999; Andrews 2000; Bytheway 2000). For example, Andrews (1999) has argued that the concept of *ageless self* indirectly assigns negative connotations to old age and therefore it is an ageist model that should not be embraced in scientific research on ageing. In so doing, she has

opposed Bytheway's (1995) argument that old age does not exist but is instead the product of culture and society. These debates demonstrate that the concept of *old age* and the category of *older people* are not universally defined or conceived and that they are more slippery than it might appear.

These two concepts have been addressed from a variety of perspectives among ageing studies and have helped highlighting the nuances and criticisms that underlie them. One example of such critical analyses is provided by Öberg and Tornstam (1999), who relate the notions to the study of body images, with particular interest on women's perceptions given that such concepts supposedly appear more clearly amongst older women, arguably more interested than men in look and appearance (see also Hurd 1999). However, the authors do not observe a decline in satisfaction with the body among older men and women; even more surprisingly, they find an increase in satisfaction among women. Furthermore, their study does not support the concepts of *mask of ageing* and *ageless self* because no discrepancies between the body and the inner self and between perceived age and chronological age are identified as a clear pattern among the informants. A different relevant study by McHugh (2003) investigates the American retirement industry in relation to the concept of ageless self. The study argues that the images of old age and place promoted by that industry reflect ageist attitudes and cultural values centred on youthfulness, which relate to active and healthy living. In his perspective, these images are dangerous because they promote an ideal that is impossible to achieve with the tempting offer of "a most alluring mask, the ageless self located in idyllic settings outside time and change" (p.169), i.e. the retirement communities. McHugh's studies (2000; 2003) are relevant to this research because although they are focused on retirement communities they emphasise the nature of places and spaces as socially constructed and defined by contested meanings and often ageist rhetoric. In so doing, his work stresses the importance of examining the constructions and interpretations of places with a critical approach and to avoid general assumptions about people's everyday life.

The concept of *ageless self*, or *agelessness*, has been linked to ageism in critical discussions of the ageing experience (Biggs et al. 2006; Hurd 1999; Mchugh 2003; Rozario & Derienzis 2009; Townsend et al. 2006). Indeed, there is a clear connection between the two given that the promotion of an ageless culture implies necessarily a denial of old age and its many negative connotations. This denial occurs so deeply in individuals' consciousness that older people are seen to refuse negative images of old age for themselves while deliberately apply them to

other older people as a coping strategy to societal stigmatisation of oldness (Townsend et al. 2006, p.898). Ageism is investigated in this thesis because ageist behaviours and societal expectations do not only influence older people's self-esteem and self-perception but they can affect to a great extent their experiences of navigating the public places of the city, especially as physical mobility and mental lucidity decrease. Findlay and McLaughlin (2005, p.128) argue that the social environment can be detrimental to older people because individuals might tend to adhere to social expectations about what their appropriate behaviours should be. This may induce social and cognitive incompetence as a sort of fulfilling prophecy, given that old age is generally depicted as a time of physical and mental decline. Ageist attitudes in the public realm may be observed on public transport, at shops, while queuing, while walking on the street, at restaurants and in other places that normally cater for younger adults and youths. Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005) stress that ageism can manifest in the form of spatial segregation, particularly in three types of spatial contexts, i.e. the household, the neighbourhood, and locations that accommodate for everyday activities outside the home. The authors claim that spatial segregation takes place where people of different ages cannot occupy the same spaces and thus cannot engage in social interaction. With regard to the third type of segregation – which is the most significant to this research – they advance the argument that social institutions are responsible for generating the spatial divide between younger and older people, given that institutionalised activities normally differentiate between age groups (e.g., senior centres), and places of entertainment are often age determined (e.g., cafés and clubs). The urban environment can also be segregating to older people in other ways, for example by being "a landscape of fear" (Mansvelt 2008, p.205), meaning that older people may feel worried to go out at night or in specific spaces. Mansvelt claims that urban planners and policymakers should address issues around the scarce participation and visibility of older people in urban spaces. In particular, she argues that if decision-makers and planners engaged directly with older people's narratives about city's spaces they would enable the implementation of informed measures that may improve public spaces while contributing to weaken ageism and segregation in the public realm (e.g., by improving lighting, accessibility, surveillance).

The focus on socio-environmental contexts within theories of ageing

The familiar environments that represent the everyday world of the older person – in particular the home or neighbourhood – have long been a central matter within ageing studies, although the examination of outdoor environments has taken place relatively recently (Phillips et al., 2013). Geographical approaches to the study of ageing focus on the person-environment relationship, which considers the environment not as a fixed context but as a transformative one that changes together with the evolving needs and abilities of the older person and his or her opportunities to exert control over the environment (Hooyman & Kiyak 2008). Therefore, the relationship between the older person and the environment is conceived as dialectic and dynamic.

As Findlay and McLaughlin (2005) stress in the book *Ageing and Place,* early theories on the relationship between socio-spatial environment and ageing were characterised by a negative emphasis in describing the ways in which older people might adjust to their environments. These theoretical perspectives are represented by the *ecological theory of ageing* and its core concepts, i.e. the *environment press model* developed by Lawton and Nahemow (1973) and the *environmental docility hypothesis* by Lawton and Simon (Lawton 1980). These depicted the old person mostly as a passive subject with declining competencies in an increasingly challenging environment. However, the subsequent development of the *docility hypothesis* by Lawton mitigated the negative view of ageing by introducing the *proactivity hypothesis* that conceives older people as proactively taking decisions to change unsuitable situations in order to maintain independence and control potential environmental press, such as it may be for housing conditions (Wahl & Oswald 2010). Still with a negative emphasis on the person-environment relationship but with a focus on the social world of the older person, the *disengagement theory* developed by Cumming and Henry (1961) supposes that older people deliberately disengage from their social and physical environments. However, this theory contemplates the possibility that voluntary withdrawal may have positive effects on overall life satisfaction because of the relief from social pressures, as stressed by Föbker and Grotz (2006). Havighurst (1963) opposed the disengagement perspective with a model known as *activity theory*, which again sees older people as more proactive in maintaining social roles and social connections or adapting to new ones. In a study on the urban forms that support older people's everyday mobility, Föbker and Grotz (2006) claim that older people's wellbeing

can be ascribed both to activity and disengagement, and therefore the living environments should enable both possibilities by considering advantages and disadvantages of different urban settings. Subsequent to the development of these opposing theories, new ones emerged which increasingly recognised the importance of adopting a life span perspective to the study of social relations in later life (Wahl et al. 2007). These theories are the *socioemotional selectivity theory* (Carstensen 1995; Carstensen et al. 1999) and the *convoy model of social relations* (Kahn & Antonucci 1980). The former maintains that older people disengage from the social and physical environments to a certain extent, and this is explained as a result of increased selectivity in social relations. In other words, older people may want to spend time and energy on those relations that are most important to them, if compared to younger people and younger adults. This, it is argued, might happen because people at different ages expect different outcomes from social interactions. While younger people's perception of lifetime as infinite may prompt them to look for social relationships that can provide them with new stimuli and information, older people's different perception of lifetime may instead spur them to cultivate relations that provide emotional rather than informational goals (Wahl et al. 2007, p.47). The latter theory takes an explicit life span approach and emphasises the social support provided by friends and family who might assist coping with difficulties and challenges in life, and this may encourage health and wellbeing. However, critiques to this theory have highlighted the possibility that support networks can have also detrimental effects by encouraging negative behaviours (Wahl et al. 2007).

Findlay and McLaughlin (2005) have stressed that over the last few decades there has been a shift towards a more positive emphasis on the person-environment relationship within theories of ageing as a consequence of the recent demographic change that has resulted in increased life expectancy and to general betterment of health conditions. Within theories of ageing it is now commonly accepted that theoretical models and empirical analyses need to consider the transactions between the physical, social and psychological environments in order to fully address the complexity that characterises the ageing process. This is an aim shared by the present research, which has not embraced one theoretical perspective among those mentioned above but has nevertheless considered them while building the arguments on older people's sociability that will be discussed in the following chapters.

Older people and the outdoor environment

As mentioned above, current societal and political discourses on ageing depict older people as healthier, more active and independent than in the past, whilst living in conditions that enhance their opportunities to get outdoors. In line with this shift, while former research on ageing focused mainly on indoor environments, the emphasis of policy and academic research has now been redirected to the investigation of outdoor areas, focusing on accessibility and mobility in familiar and unfamiliar environments (Blackman et al. 2003; Burton & Mitchell 2006; Matusoka & Kaplan 2008; Newton et al. 2010; Open Space Research Centre 2011; Phillips et al. 2010; Risser et al. 2010; Valdemarsson et al. 2005; Walford et al. 2011). In a review of the literature concerned with older people's wellbeing outdoors, Sugiyama and Thompson (2007) stress that older people appear to engage with the outdoor environment in three main ways, which at times interrelate and overlap. These ways are participation in physical activity, exposure to outdoor natural elements and social interactions with friends and neighbours, which are all reported to influence positively people's quality of life. The degree to which older individuals are able to engage with and benefit from the outdoor environment closely relates to mobility, and there is a consensus in the literature that mobility in later life is essential to enhance people's social and physical wellbeing. A substantial body of work in urban design and transport-related research looks at older people's mobility in the public realm, highlighting specifically the design features that may ease or hinder their navigation of public spaces and also the elements that may facilitate opportunities for social interaction (Burton & Mitchell 2006; Day 2008; Lavery et al. 1996; Mehta 2009; Phillips et al. 2010; Risser et al. 2010; Valdemarsson et al. 2005).

For what concerns the relationship between design and sociability of older people, Day (2008) argues that some features of the neighbourhood might affect the level of interaction. One of the features relates to the level of walkability of the area, and the author claims that walkable environments with well-controlled traffic and presence of shops in proximity to each other encourage chance interactions among older people. Related to this, she finds that among the three case study areas considered for the study (i.e., an inner city neighbourhood, a suburban estate and a small coastal town) the likelihood to experience some form of social interaction in relation to walkability is higher in the coastal town because of its more pedestrian-friendly layout. However, the supposedly positive relationship between

walkability and sociability in the neighbourhood has been questioned by a research undertaken in Adelaide, South Australia, which examined whether more walkable environments might enhance local sociability (Du Toit et al. 2007). The authors do not find correlations between the level of walkability of the area (measured according to a walkability index) and the degree of social interaction, informal social control or social cohesion (Du Toit et al. 2007, p.1689). Therefore, interestingly their data do not suggest that pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods are particularly significant in promoting strong social ties between residents. Proceeding with the consideration of the key-findings of Day's study, the presence of shops is another feature that appears to impact older people's chance to socialise in the public realm. Day finds that in the inner city area the decline in number and quality of shops has led to fewer opportunities to meet acquaintances during everyday shopping activities and as a consequence to the reduction of social interactions. Moreover, safety concerns in the city area are found to discourage older people from walking and sitting on benches in parks, and as a result this prevents them from interacting with other users of the space. Hence, it can be argued that simply the presence of sitting space does not necessarily make people want to use it when issues of personal safety become the priority. Lastly, Day mentions some features of housing and neighbourhood layout as significant contributors to enhanced sociability among the older residents, for example the availability of shared open spaces within the neighbourhood. In another study on age-friendly places and the role of planning in improving older people's quality of life, Gilroy (2008) notices that older people are more concerned with the loss of sites of social interaction in urban neighbourhoods than improvements in welfare provision. Such loss stems from the closure of local stores, pleasant informal sites that provide opportunities for social interaction with shopkeepers and acquaintances. She observes that to older people these chance encounters are extremely important in nourishing people's attachment to their local area (Gilroy 2008, p.156).

Studies on outdoor mobility of older people are significant within ageing studies and they engage with a wide spectrum of issues. In part, research on mobility in later life considers the physical and psychological benefits of regular walking on people's health and wellbeing (Ruuskanen & Ruoppila 1995; Simonsick et al. 2005; Van Cauwenberg et al. 2014; Weuve et al. 2004). For example, findings from a study by Simonsick et al. (2005) prove the association between regular walking and prevention of mobility loss in functionally limited women aged 65 and older, and the results from a study by Weuve et al. (2004) demonstrate better cognitive function and less cognitive decline in women aged 70 and older who undertake

physical activity, including walking. With regard to walking practices, pioneering studies have developed walkability audit tools that may help enhance older people's experiences as pedestrians in the built environment (Cunningham et al. 2005; Michael et al. 2009; Phillips et al. 2010), while other research has explored older citizens' confidence in walking through unfamiliar areas by involving older people directly in the projects (Walford et al. 2011). In addition to the focus on health or the development of aiding tools, older people's mobility has been addressed from other perspectives. These include investigations of older people's patterns of mobility in urban/suburban areas, travelling experiences by public or private transport and the impacts of mobility on people's quality of life (Banister & Bowling 2004; Föbker & Grotz 2006; Lord et al. 2011; Metz 2000; Mollenkopf et al. 2007; Risser et al. 2010). Nowadays the older population of different European countries is travelling more than it used to do over the 1980s and 1990s, and this trend may reflect recent changes in lifestyle and generally enhanced health and wealth conditions (Banister & Bowling 2004; Wahl et al. 2007). Research shows that health and transport options are the most important determinants of individual mobility, in particular car availability is found to play a determinant role in enhancing personal mobility (Bannister & Bowling, 2004; Mollenkopf et al. 2007). As it might be expected, older people's mobility is found to decrease with age due to the progressive decline in functional health, and a study by Mollenkopf et al. (2007) observes that the spatial range travelled by older people in urban and rural areas of Germany, Finland and Italy is quite restricted, with 44% of the total trips recorded by the subjects occurring within a circle of 1 km from home (p.182). The authors argue that health conditions are a more relevant factor than age in determining the extent of personal mobility and the quality of the outdoor experience. Indeed, good health enhances the likelihood of coping successfully with possible obstacles in the urban environment, such as traffic or uneven pavements, which may worry older people to the extent that they may limit the degree of personal mobility. As stressed in a paper by Rantakokko et al. (2009), research shows that health concerns (especially fear of falling and fear of crime) are very common among older people, in particular among older women, older people from lower classes and those with poor health. Amongst the studies that focus on this matter, Risser et al. (2010) examine the barriers to older people's mobility in eight European countries and consider how those barriers impact on older people's everyday life in the built environment. They find that busy traffic and lack of toilet facilities are a major cause of discomfort shared by the subjects of all different countries. They also emphasise the distress experienced on very crowded public transport and the generally negative attitudes of

other users towards older people when sharing the same public space. The last point is of particular relevance for this research as it highlights that the perceived lack of kindness and respect may result in the decision not to go out to avoid feeling disrespected or humiliated. This consideration stresses the significant role of social interactions in determining the quality of the outdoor experience and it suggests that people's behaviours may also influence older citizens' extent of mobility as movement in space and time. With regard to the impact of people's behaviours on older people's mobility and experiences of public places, Biggs and Tinker (2007) argue that:

> "[c]ities are complex organisms that rely on effective interaction between people's homes, the possibilities of communication and travel, the availability of appropriate services and also less tangible, yet vitally important, influences such as a sense of belonging, security and the kindness of others" (p.5).

Further examinations of mobility in later life have looked at the different meanings of *mobilities* in older people's lives (Green et al. 2013; Ziegler & Schwanen 2011). In this regard, Ziegler and Schwanen (2011) provide a detailed review of the interpretations of the concept of *mobility* in the gerontological literature, stressing that it is normally understood in three major ways, i.e. actually realised movement, potential for movement and physical functioning (p.760). However, they argue, mobility is much more than this and it should not be conceptualised simply through an instrumental lens that conceives it as a functional movement from one place to another. Instead, they emphasise the importance of a holistic perspective that looks also at mobility *practices*, meaning the "acts involved in movement through physical space, as well as those acts undertaken during movements or at particular locations" (p.768). The authors link mobility and wellbeing by claiming that the possibility to be mobile provides independence and autonomy, and they underline the influence of positive self-perception of ageing on successful mobility practices. By sharing a similar understanding of mobility, Green et al. (2013) look at the meanings of free bus travel among 47 subjects above 60 years old living in London, and they explore the correlations between free mobility and wellbeing. They emphasise the intangible benefits that stem from using public buses which have positive impact on overall wellbeing, i.e. opportunities to socialise on the bus, mitigate loneliness, engage in the public realm and feel part of the community (p.18). The bus is described as a social site where older people can meet "the other", including for example

younger people or individuals from different social groups. In so doing, they depict mobility by bus as a resource that provides opportunities for social encounters and engagement with people. These conceptualisations move beyond more common definitions of *mobility* that conceive it purely as a mean to access destinations.

Other studies have examined the impact of different environmental features on older people's mobility. These include analyses specifically focused either on the urban or the rural and the impacts of such environments on the lives of older people. In this regard, Phillipson and Scharf (2005) provided a concise review of relevant work and argued that the fields of rural and urban gerontology would have been subjected to greater development within social gerontology over the following years, as mentioned in the introductory part of this thesis. Further environmental features that have been examined as affecting older people's mobility relate to weather conditions. For example, a study by Hjorthol (2013) looks at the impact of winter weather on the likelihood to get outdoors in later life in Norway. The study finds that older people's mobility and level of activity decrease in the winter compared to the summer season, because winter conditions make journeys to different places more difficult (e.g., inadequate clearance of pavements prevent them from walking). The same study also observes that in wintertime mobility and activity levels reduce progressively with increasing age, therefore drawing a linear connection between age and mobility. Other research on the same topic is provided by Wennberg et al. (2009), who investigated older people's experiences as pedestrians in the built environment in two Swedish medium-size cities. The particular characteristic of this study is its adoption of a year-round perspective and its consideration of variances in people's experiences of the environment in bare-ground and snow/ice conditions. The findings are in line with Hjorthol (2013) in showing a higher impact of barriers to personal mobility as individuals' age increases. However, more significant differences were found when considering functional limitations, as older people with some limitations perceived outdoor conditions and accessibility issues as more important than those without any functional limitation. Given the considerable impact of barriers on older people's mobility in inclement weather conditions, the authors make recommendations to planners including the removal of barriers in snow/ice conditions, provision and maintenance of benches, clear separations of pedestrians' and cyclists' paths on pavements (p.286).

The studies discussed in this section might provide urban planning and transport policy with potentially relevant information about older people's uses of outdoor environments

contributing to enhanced design and service delivery. They address issues of accessibility and liveability mainly from an urban design perspective, where objectives of sustainability and social inclusion are pursued mostly by providing and bettering environmental constituents of public spaces.[2] Although the improvement of physical features ideally leads to better accessibility, questions remain with regard to whether this actually encourages people from different age groups to use, mix and interact in public space in positive ways, and such an issue is not addressed clearly in these studies. Exceptions to this are provided by the abovementioned works by Gilroy (2008) and Biggs and Tinker (2007), which mention explicitly the role of more intangible societal and individual influences affecting older people's use of public spaces. These influences are of fundamental importance in determining older people's likelihood of getting outdoors and of enjoying everyday life in public places. In line with this consideration, this research argues that design per se cannot guarantee enhanced accessibility to public spaces unless accompanied by behavioural changes in society, including both older people's attitudes to later life and the attitudes of the general public towards the older population.

2. Timmer and Seymoar (2005) report a few definitions of *liveability*. Here, we consider the following one: "Livability refers to an urban system that contributes to the physical, social and mental well being and personal development of all its inhabitants. It is about delightful and desirable urban spaces that offer and reflect cultural and sacred enrichment. Key principles that give substance to this theme are equity, dignity, accessibility, conviviality, participation and empowerment" (p.2).

Public spaces and geographies of urban encounters

Within geographical research there is increasing interest in the geographies of urban encounters, which investigate how social interactions and the spaces of the city influence each other (Amin 2008; Du Toit et al. 2007; Cattell et al. 2008; Degen et al. 2010; Laurier & Philo 2006; Phillips & Smith 2006; Thrift 2005; Valentine 2008; Watson 2006a; Wilson 2011). Although from a range of theoretical perspectives and with different arguments, the authors consider urban encounters as ephemeral and temporal interactions between strangers that are emblematic of contemporary city life and can influence the liveability of a place. Focus of such analyses are the transient encounters between the unacquainted, such as offering the seat on a bus or holding the door open as a courtesy to somebody, and the effects that these encounters have on people's wellbeing and civic sense. For example, Laurier and Philo (2006) examine the unfolding of social practices in the café, which represents an ideal gathering place to study momentary and situated interactions among the unacquainted, and they underline the peculiarity of such places in allowing individuals to enjoy being left alone while being among strangers. In a different study, Wilson (2011) undertakes an ethnographic investigation of intercultural encounters that take place on buses in Birmingham. In particular, she examines the enduring effects of these encounters and the ways in which the "throwntogetherness" of individuals informs personal perceptions of "others" through processes of differentiation and exclusion. She concludes by arguing that on the bus "new modes of living with difference might emerge and be demanded, yet may also be concurrently challenged, undermined, or called to account" (p.646). Another example is provided by Watson (2006a; 2009), whose work explores the negotiation of difference in ordinary urban spaces. In particular, she opposes the negative connotations of danger or dullness often associated to the public space, to emphasise its positive nature instead. By discussing a few examples including street markets and community allotments, Watson claims that public places where people rub along arouse excitement, safety and inclusion. Different from the previous authors yet looking at ordinary interactions among the unacquainted is the study by Phillips and Smith (2006), which looks at urban incivilities that are part of people's everyday life. The authors find that the perpetrators of everyday incivilities were not minority youth

but were individuals who may not be expected to encourage incivility, specifically adult and older people. In so doing, the authors dismantle general perceptions about age groups that are fundamentally based on ageism. They also emphasise that incivility should not be automatically associated with the urban form and the city life, since their results find only a slightly higher probability of negative encounters in the urban environment.

The increased interest in the social aspects of cities does not characterise academic research exclusively, as also planning and policy practice have addressed the issue. For example, the Grattan Institute has recently published a document that underlines that a sort of town planning that does not take account of social needs may be the major cause of social isolation and segregation (Kelly 2012).[3] The document discusses various planning measures that may support social connections and social interactions outdoors, while it recognises that city design cannot be considered as the solution to all the challenges posed by most urban environments. The measures proposed in the document relate to city structure and mobility infrastructure, which should aim to facilitate people's chances to interact with each other. Further measures relate to land use, neighbourhoods' layout and provision of public and semi-public places that might offer opportunities for sociability; to the promotion of variety in commercial streets in terms of businesses and building facades; to the encouragement of local events that might assist communities' social cohesion and nourish a shared sense of identity. The Grattan Institute emphasises the importance of considering the social sphere of cities within planning because there are worrying signs of increasing isolation and loneliness in the Australian urban context. In light of this, the suggested planning interventions are expected to encourage social occasions, described in the document as essential to people's wellbeing. Another example comes from the UK, specifically a study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Holland et al. 2007) that looks at how different social groups interact in public and semi-public spaces in urban areas. In particular, the study considers age, gender and type of place as significant variables in the exploration of the ways in which people interact with each other, with the aim to inform policy agendas on shared spaces, contested spaces, intergenerational relationships, safety, and management of public spaces. The document draws a causal relationship between human unpredictability and the vitality of urban public places:

3. The Grattan Institute is a think tank that works on public policy in Australia.

> "Public spaces are places for the mundane, the expected and the banal (...). Yet this 'everyday' quality can mean that small, cost-effective improvements can be made to enhance public spaces simply by breaking up monotony – for example by providing entertainment and 'attractions'. These need not be expensive tokens of high culture, but can include street musicians, market stalls or something 'different' to look at." (p.68)

In addition, the authors of the document underline the importance of "places to be" (p.69), i.e. places where an individual can spend as much time as he or she wants with friends, family, alone, or surrounded by passers-by. "Places to be" are considered by the authors as being highly important at all ages. Contested spaces and "slack" spaces are also mentioned as inevitable and fundamental in the processes of place-making, implying that planning should not aim to negate such elements in the design of public spaces. In light of the examples described in this section it can be noticed that a considerable interest in the sociability of cities and its contribution to people's enjoyment of urban life has emerged within academic and policy research. The present project aims to add to the investigations on the geography of social interactions with an in-depth exploration of older people's everyday sociability in urban areas.

The study of urban sociability can shed light on the level of social sustainability of cities, given the social and cultural diversity that characterises urban environments and the fact that public encounters among the unacquainted take place continuously, e.g. when we walk or cycle, when we go to restaurants or cafés, when we accidently bump into someone on the street.[4] To various researchers of city life, the mingling of strangers is the very essence of the urban form (Fincher & Iveson 2008). For example, Laurier and Philo (2006) underline cities' intrinsic diversity by claiming that a city is a "place, above all, of living with others" (p.193), while Young (1990) specifically defines the city as "the being together of strangers" (p.237). The intrinsic coexistence of "diversities" means that cities and their public spaces can be sites of democracy and civic engagement as well as contested and dividing ones, raising issues of power relations, rights, inclusion and exclusion (Amin 2008; Massey 2005; Young 1990). As

4. Notwithstanding the vagueness embedded in the concept of *social sustainability*, this study considers it as the satisfaction of social needs such as recreation/leisure, social relationships, and equity, which – together with the fulfilment of other basic needs such as food, housing, healthy environment, and health care – contribute to enhance people's quality of life (Littig & Grießler 2005).

such, public spaces challenge political agendas aimed at building sustainable cities and communities. In this regard, urban policy tends to address the complex nature of public spaces mostly in terms of design and management (CABE 2008; Cattell et al. 2008; ODPM 2006b), with the assumption that people's experience of public spaces may be enhanced by adequate design and service provision.

This is reflected also in the policy and academic emphasis on the conviviality of cities, which identifies those fleeting and mundane moments of sociability that define people's outdoor life and that might contribute to positive perceptions of the public realm (Bell 2007; Fincher 2003; Fincher & Iveson 2008; Kelly 2012; Peattie 1998). Semenza and March (2009) provide a rather dystopian image of American cities as environments that encourage malaises and diseases at the expenses of community cohesion, and they claim that "[s]ustainable communities are threatened in part by the physical design of urban neighborhoods that are not conducive to social interactions" (p.22). The authors are particularly concerned with the loss of opportunities for interactions that result from the lack of public gathering spaces (e.g., squares) and from the car-oriented structure of the city. Such loss, it is argued, can undermine people's mutual understanding, trust, and engagement with civic life. Instead, they envisage more public places that might support bonding processes between residents. They argue that such processes may be encouraged through people's direct involvement in the design of public spaces, which may then promote a sense of community and a sense of place. Back in 1998, Peattie proposed *conviviality* as an alternative concept to the one of *community* normally used among planners who wanted to engage with the civil society. She conceives conviviality as characterised:

> "not only by cheerful activities like singing in pubs or street dancing at a block party, but also by the small-group rituals and social bonding in serious collective action (...). [T]he term 'conviviality' points to the social energy in all sorts of small or dissenting manifestations. '[C]onviviality' points to the human need to flower, to create out of the mundane materials of life a special occasion, whether it is a dinner party or a piece of political theatre presenting a vision of the future." (p.247)

The author argues that conviviality may encourage sociability in urban public spaces in its most playful and positive concretisation, if promoted by ad-hoc planning decisions. The concept of *conviviality* is generally applied in the form of commensalism, including

commercial places that accommodate for convivial interactions (i.e., cafés and restaurants) and neighbourhoods' dinner parties. In a paper on the hospitality of cities, Bell (2007) emphasises the modern public culture based on cafés and restaurants and highlights the opportunity given to café owners to shape their commercial places in ways that might support specific kinds of conviviality and hospitality. Therefore, rather than considering cafés simply as businesses, he assigns them a transformative role in shaping the ways people live their sociability in the city and the ways in which those mundane encounters that form people's everyday lives are experienced. Similarly and inspired by Peattie's work, Fincher (2003) advocates a kind of planning that encourages convivial interactions. In particular, she argues that the design of public spaces can help making social encounters more likely to happen, more enjoyable and less accompanied by anxiety (p.8). The introduction of the concepts of *encounter* and *conviviality* in academic literature was intended to provide new inspirations in urban planning by stressing the importance of sociability in public places. Fincher and Iveson (2008) claim that "the right to the city is also a right to *encounter*" (p.145), and they emphasise the fundamental role that encounters with strangers play in the exploration of different aspects of ourselves, depending on the momentary relationship that is established with the "stranger", e.g. customer-shopkeeper or passenger-bus driver relationships. The emphasis on conviviality suggests that significant but more elusive social forces than design and planning might contribute to determine the outcome of individuals' experiences. These forces are people's feelings, attitudes and dispositions towards public places and towards the people who are co-using such places. Such forces cannot be overlooked since people's relation to spaces are characterised by ingrained deep emotions developed by each individual in different ways. In other words, people are emotionally involved with places, which are repositories of personal memories, feelings and attachments, and they foster a continuous transformation of individual and collective identities and practises (Cattell et al. 2008; Davidson et al. 2005; Milligan et al. 2005; Spaul & Hockey 2011; Wilson 2011).

Outdoor sociability in later life

It is generally agreed that social contact in later life has a positive impact on overall wellbeing, especially because it can help prevent loneliness and isolation, arguably more likely to manifest in old age. While loneliness often is caused by the loss of friends and partners or by poor health conditions that limit social opportunities, social isolation can result from other factors, some of which relate to the characteristics of the urban environment. With regard to the environmental aspects that may lead to social isolation among vulnerable older people, Kim and Clarke (2014) find that neighbourhoods' security signs within the area of residence are positively associated with social isolation and – to a minor extent – social withdrawal (the latter is intended as a voluntary decision to disengage from public life, whereas isolation is a forced condition). The authors claim that specific kinds of vigilance tactics and public safety programmes (e.g., "Neighbourhood watch") end up obtaining the exact opposite effect to the one they are planned for. In other words, those tactics and programmes may increase fear of crime, anxiety, isolation, and exclusion of citizens rather than reassuring them about the safety of the area (p.16). Therefore, according to Kim and Clarke there are features of the urban environment that can play a significant role in hindering or enhancing social engagement among older people, which should be promoted and supported. In a study by Nezlek et al. (2002), the authors used questionnaires and structured diaries to measure the day-to-day social interactions of a sample of older people for two weeks and they noticed that those participants who experienced rewarding social interactions reported greater psychological wellbeing. In particular, they also find a positive relationship between wellbeing and quantity of social interactions. The studies by Kim and Clarke (2014) and by Nezlek et al. (2002) emphasise the importance of sociability in later life, however they investigate respectively older people's experiences of social isolation and social interactions by examining surveys and data sets only. Hence, people's experiences were not discussed through in-depth interviews that might have provided more articulated and insightful perspectives.

In addition, a number of studies underline that chance interactions in public spaces are as important as more structured sociability in enhancing older people's quality of life, and research demonstrates that passing encounters have a positive influence on psychological wellbeing. For example, Newton et al. (2010) have examined older people's preferences for environmental design features within different UK neighbourhood settings, finding that

socialising is a main reason to get outdoors, together with doing physical exercise and being in contact with nature. In line with this research, Day (2008) argues that outdoor social interaction should not be underestimated because, according to her study, such social opportunities were of crucial importance to older people. Social interactions – from regular contacts to incidental encounters – have been increasingly regarded as paramount in enhancing wellbeing, health and quality of life of older people (Burton & Mitchell 2006; Day 2008; Fiori et al. 2008; Kelly 2012; Open Space Research Centre 2011), and policy debates have recognised their role in promoting sustainability and liveability of public spaces and urban communities (ODPM 2006a; World Health Organization 2007).

Studies that focus specifically on people with dementia by Burton and Mitchell (2006) and Newton et al. (2010) have examined the extent to which design can be supportive of older people's social experiences outdoors by adopting qualitative research methods. They find that widths of footways and footpaths greatly condition opportunities to stop and talk to others, and that the presence of public seating, shelter, and toilets contributes to create welcoming and enjoyable places. Sauter and Huettenmoser (2008) argue that so-called "encounter zones" in Switzerland encourage older people to get outdoors and linger in public spaces where street design and traffic measures are favourable. These are described as areas that include speed limits of 20 km/h, pedestrian priority, right for the children to play in the streets, provision of benches and limited space for parking. Other studies observe that social interactions can be influenced in a negative way by the social characteristics of the neighbourhood. For example, positive interactions may be inhibited by the fear of crime or by ruthlessness and expressed impatience towards older people by other people (Cook et al. 2007; Day 2008; Scharf et al. 2005). Moreover, Milligan et al. (2005) find that older people may change their everyday habits and withdraw from favourite places at certain times of the day to avoid contact with people and negative societal attitudes, becoming – in Rowles' (1978) words – prisoners of space. Findlay and McLaughlin (2005) provide an explanation for this behaviour by claiming that "in old age there is a move away from problem-focused responses to emotion-focused responses" (p.125).

These studies support a correlation between indicators of socio-environmental inclusion of public spaces and the quality of social interactions. However, the latter are not the primary focus of the examinations but rather a secondary aspect to issues of design quality and physical accessibility. An exception to this is provided by the previously mentioned study by

the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which addresses social interactions in public spaces as a primary concern together with issues of social exclusion (Holland et al. 2007). In the document, the exploration of social interactions between people in urban public spaces is highly encouraged to the extent that it is considered as the starting point in the development of practices that may translate policy rhetoric into reality (Holland et al., 2007, p.3). It appears from their data that older people's personal confidence is weakened by the presence of other people, and such lack of confidence undermines their opportunities to fully avail themselves of public places to the extent that they might want. The authors' investigation of how different social and age groups use and interact in public spaces highlights the tendency among older people to feel excluded or to actively withdraw themselves from public spaces when these are frequented by younger people, raising questions of intergenerational relationships and social exclusion. In the document it is claimed that:

> "older people were very sensitive to the presence of others in public places. They tended to be absent from areas that are heavily used by older children and young adults." (p.40)

However, the reasons why older people may feel so distressed by the presence of younger people or children are not explored in the study. The lack of an informed investigation of the rationales that underlie such attitudes may lead to simplifying assumptions about the reality of intergenerational relationships, assumptions based more on commonplace than on careful scrutiny of primary data. For example, a generalising assumption could be that older people may exclude themselves from some public spaces because of the rudeness and disrespect of younger people towards older citizens or because youths are associated with vandalism. This is observed for example in the study by Yen et al. (2012), which finds that older people see youths as a threat. However, Yen et al.'s study does not report older people as withdrawing from a space occupied by younger people; instead, it finds that older and younger people may occupy the same space and yet they might look as belonging to two separate groups. A different possible explanation of some older people's tendency to withdraw from public places could be that the places frequented by younger people and children do not offer anything of particular interest to older people. Holland et al. (2012) recognise the possibility that a general lack of attractive activities or venues for older people may discourage them to engage with specific public spaces, but the conjecture is not further developed in the document with the analysis of primary data. However, interestingly they underline a possible

intrinsic positive aspect of withdrawing from public spaces by arguing that self-segregation might be interpreted as an element that contributes to processes of identity creation rather than to the obstruction of community cohesion (p.45).

Another study that considers social interactions among older people as a main focus is provided by Gardner (2011). The author uses Oldenburg's (1989) concept of *third places* to identify public spaces that share essential characteristics including being accessible and on neutral ground, conversation as the main activity, lingering of users within their premises, familiarity and intimacy that make people feel at home. Examples of these places are public parks, diners, bakers, barbers, small grocery stores and community organisations. In addition to the third places as defined by Oldenburg, Gardner proposes a further category of public space that is of particular relevance to this study, i.e. *transitory zones* (2011, p.267). These are constituted by the places in which individuals pass through during the day, and they are observed to play a particularly important social role in the lives of older people. For example, sidewalks near the house, seats on buses, the queue line at the local store and all the variety of everyday spaces of transition. Gardner argues that third places and transitory zones play a great role in the day-to-day life of older people by facilitating social interactions (p.267). In particular, she claims that such places provide opportunities to experience three main types of social interactions, i.e. relationships of proximity (neighbours), relationships of service (retail personnel) and relationships of chance (strangers). For what concerns the second type, she finds that micro-business-interactions play an important role in making an older person feel visible in society, as feeling noticed can be more challenging for older citizens than for younger adults or youths (p.268). Also with regard to relationships of chance that occur in the neighbourhood, Gardner stresses that these play a substantial role in supporting older people's wellbeing. She even hypothesises a future where such interactions with strangers will be increasingly important in the lives of the older population, due to a number of reasons related to family structure, life expectancy, and housing design. Gardner provides us with valuable considerations, however the study is based only on 6 people with an average age of 82.5 years and therefore it offers limited scope for generalisation of the results. By exploring older people's everyday sociability in the public realm, the present study wishes to advance Gardner's investigation through the analysis of primary data collected among 50 older people from a wider spectrum of ages.

A further examination of social interactions in old age is offered by Watson (2006a) with her study on social encounters in the public places of the city. Watson questions the common assumption that older people's sociability drastically reduces as a consequence of fewer opportunities to frequent sociable places that are increasingly targeted at younger adults or youths. On the contrary, she contends, older people are reinventing their own places of sociability and association, but often these places are not visible very easily – for example they could be marginal places like community allotments. In her perspective, thinking that older people have less social opportunities only means that we are not considering the right places but we are instead looking at the wrong ones (p.113). In a study on the same topic written for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, she focuses on one specific marginal public place frequented by older people, i.e. the marketplace (Watson 2006b). She finds that such a place is crucial to the life of older people, in particular to older women, and she describes it as more important to older citizens than to any other group of society. The market, she argues, is a place of social inclusion and care of "the other" encouraged by the mutual recognition between people within the place. In particular, she claims that:

> "a variety of inclusive behaviours and 'care work' was performed daily by traders in the markets studied. The two groups of people for whom markets were most significant in this respect were older people and people with disabilities, although many customers were similarly looked after." (Watson 2009, p.1583)

Notwithstanding the social opportunities provided by marketplaces to some older people, it should be stressed that the desire to socially interact and to be looked after or even just to be recognised in the market may not characterise older people indiscriminately and therefore should not be taken for granted or generalised. Most studies mentioned in this section seem to assume that social interactions between the unacquainted usually are desired among older people, and that interactions between people might be encouraged through policy and planning. In contrast to this, the present research does not embrace a priori the assumption that more interactions necessarily need to take place among strangers. The findings of some studies support this approach to study sociability in the public realm and therefore are significant to this research. For example, the results by Yen et al. (2012) challenge the assumption that sociability has always a positive impact on psychological wellbeing in later life, as they find that older people's expectations from neighbourliness are diverse and that

older people do not always desire close relations with neighbours. More precisely, the authors observe that a number of informants wanted detached relationships because they did not want to know about or get involved with their neighbours and did not desire to take part to local gossiping. Rather than examining social interactions through definitions set up by the researcher or through technical measurements (cf. instead Nezlek et al. 2002), this research uses older people's lived experiences and narratives as a primary source to investigate the forms that sociability takes among older people and to critically address the assumption that links good quality of life to the level of sociability experienced. This is in line with Laurier and Philo's (2006) provocative claim that in geography and urban studies it is often assumed that:

> "there should be *more* interaction, particularly more talk, going on between the unacquainted. On this thinking, the city would be a better place if strangers talked to one another more regularly and at greater length." (p.193)

In claiming so, the authors refer in particular to public spaces where sociability is not expected, such as when unplanned interactions between strangers take place in the street. These words by Laurier and Philo should not be considered as a sceptical approach to study sociability in public places. Indeed, their aim is the examination of the constituents of the relationships between sociability and specific public places through ethnomethodological investigations, whose objectives are not the definition of better rules, the supply of correctives or the improvement of conduct so that to encourage better practices among citizens (p.194). In their studies they develop fascinating analyses of social interactions in specific setting, e.g. the café, which are of particular interest for the present research and thus will be considered in the analytical chapters (Laurier & Philo 2003; Laurier et al. 2001).

To conclude, the review of relevant literature has indeed covered a wide range of themes. This was necessary because of the multidisciplinarity of the topic and the multi-faceted nature of the ageing process. Issues around liveability, social sustainability and inclusion of public places, active ageing and interpretations of later life will be addressed further in the analytical chapters through the discussion of respondents' narratives about their everyday lives. In so doing, the thesis provides a nuanced view of older people's life in urban public places and a critical approach to the abovementioned issues.

Chapter 3 – Research methods and data analysis

The "mobilities turn" and mobile methods

As stressed in the introduction and literature review, the specific focus of this research is on older people's everyday life outdoors. In particular, this study looks at their experiences of social interactions, at their activities and mobility patterns in urban public places. In light of such a focus, the "new mobilities paradigm" (Sheller & Urry 2006) – also called "mobilities turn" – has been adopted as a methodological framework for this study. Major exponents of this paradigm in social sciences, particularly within the fields of sociology and geography, stress that we live in a highly mobile world, not just in terms of corporeal movements (e.g., walking, climbing, driving, cycling, travelling by train or by bus etc.) but also in terms of new forms of virtual and imaginative movements made possible by global and local flows of information, objects and ideas (Murray 2009; Sheller & Urry 2006). The mobilities turn has emerged as a critical response to a kind of social science that has been accused of "a-mobility" by the main contributors to this approach (Sheller & Urry 2006, p.208). The static nature of most methodologies in social science has been described as the result of a failure in spatialising social relations due to the poor attention to the mobilities involved in family life, work life, leisure, politics and other aspects of people's lives:

> "Even while it has increasingly introduced spatial analysis the social sciences have still failed to examine how the spatialities of social life presuppose (and frequently involve conflict over) both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, person to person, event to event." (Sheller & Urry 2006, p.208)

Five types of interdependent mobilities are thought to produce social life, i.e. the corporeal travel, the physical movement of objects and commodities, the imaginative travel that occurs through talk and visual media, the virtual travel that transcends geographical and social distance and lastly the communicative travel via messages, letters, telephone, mobile etc. (Büscher & Urry 2009, p.101). Great emphasis is placed on corporeal and virtual mobility

across distance because, according to influential authors, social science has been based on propinquity and co-presence, overlooking the dynamic processes that characterise social life. Instead, they argue:

> "(social life) presumes relationships of intermittent presence and modes of absence depending in part upon multiple technologies of travel and communications that move objects, people, ideas, images across varying distances." (Büscher & Urry 2009, p.101)

Related to the new mobilities paradigm, mobile methods have become exceptionally popular among researchers in a variety of studies on people's mobilities because the exploration of an increasingly mobile world would seem to require less static methods of research (Büscher & Urry 2009; Fincham et al. 2010; Murray 2009). In other words, it is argued that the traditional method of the in-depth interview is not the most adequate technique to capture what is thought to elude representation such as the habitual, the mobile, the momentary, the chaotic, but also the sensory, the emotional and the kinaesthetic. Because of the inadequacy of such techniques, it is claimed that new research methodologies "on the move" must be developed (Büscher & Urry 2009; Law & Urry 2004). The underlying argument among exponents of mobile methods is that traditional methods of inquiry are limiting because they cannot capture *what* is happening *when* it is happening, removing the space and time dimensions from the actual experience:

> "Everyday activities are considered to be so embedded in space that to carry out research in another space can limit the potential of the data as it removes the immediate relationship between the participant and that emotional and social space." (Murray 2009, p.472)

An increasing number of studies are experimenting with different mobile methods with the purpose of attaining a more comprehensive representation of people's mobile experiences. For example, studies have used video-recording undertaken by the research subjects to investigate experiences of walking, driving and cycling, or have used video-recording to observe people in specific contexts (Laurier et al. 2008; Laurier & Philo 2006; Pink 2007; Simpson 2011; Spinney 2009). Others have adopted time-space diaries written by the research subjects (Crosbie 2006; Latham 2003), GIS and GPS tracking to study patterns of mobilities and perceptions of space and place (Dennis 2006; Dennis et al. 2009; Jones & Evans

2012; Jones et al. 2011; Parks 2001; Yen et al. 2013), and participant observation methods like the "go-along", also called "ride-along" or "walk-along" according to the mode of transport used (Carpiano 2009; Jones & Evans 2012; Kusenbach 2003).

Despite the popularity of the mobilities turn, some authors have questioned that the immediacy between researcher, research subjects, space and time might lead to collect more accurate data (Hitchings 2012; Merriman 2013; Middleton 2011). Furthermore, the authors dispute the newness of such methods given that these originate from an established tradition of ethnographic and anthropological techniques, and they problematise the actual need to adopt them with the specific aim to reach an uncontentious understanding of social phenomena. As Merriman (2013) argues, "physical proximity and co-presence present an illusion of 'first-handedness', closeness, accuracy and authenticity" (p.10), because the researcher's experience of walking, driving or riding along with the participant will never be perfectly aligned to the other person's experience. The authors do not argue the futility of mobile methods as a whole, but they emphasise the inappropriateness of considering such methods as more effective than others, especially when compared with interviews that are often discounted among the promoters of mobile methods. Instead, these authors consider interviews as well as writing practices such as diary-writing as exemplary "static" research methods that despite their static nature they allow respondents to articulate those – supposedly unspeakable – embodied practices (Hitchings 2012; Merriman 2013).

Mobile methods have been considered as an appropriate technique to adopt for this research because of the focus on the mobile, the outdoors and the everyday. Similar to Dennis et al.'s (2009) study on the implications of place for the health of children, a methodological approach was developed to enable respondents to show where they went by using GPS tracking and maps, to illustrate what they saw and what they did by using photography, and to narrate their everyday experiences through interviews. In addition, each respondent was accompanied for a few hours during one of his or her journeys out and about. This method was intended to enable the researcher to experience first-hand the everyday life of the individual while navigating the public realm. It also trialled the effectiveness of navigating the environment with the research subjects to capture people's lived experiences more accurately (a more detailed description of the research methods and a discussion of the mobile methods adopted is provided in the section "Research methods", p.57).

In less than a decade, an increasing number of studies have adopted qualitative GIS and GPS tracking to explore people's mobilities and everyday use of spaces and some of these works have also aimed to inform urban planning decisions (Dennis 2006; Jones et al. 2011). Jones and Evans (2012) have argued that limited attempts have been undertaken to combine mobile methods with geospatial technology. To overcome this paucity, Jones et al. (2011) used GPS devices in combination with other methods for two different studies on fear of crime and studentification in Birmingham. In the latter study they asked participants to take photos of the areas and they used the GPS to assign each photo the coordinates of where it was taken; then they looked at the images on Google Earth with the authors of the photos to "empower participants to think about their area in new ways and challenge conventional planning knowledges of their locale" (p.182). In addition, Jones and Evans (2012) have combined GPS positioning with audio-diaries, i.e. they asked 28 commuter cyclists in Birmingham to record a diary while cycling home. In so doing, every segment of voice recorded could be matched with the right geographic location and the result was that each diary became a series of points within a GIS, what they called "spatial transcript". More recently, Yen et al. (2013) piloted GPS tracking to record 40 older people's activity patterns in San Francisco and Los Angeles with the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of such technology in the documentation of the modes of travel, the paths and the destinations. Underlying these approaches there is a clear emphasis on capturing the experience while it is happening, with the belief that the perfect match between time, space and action can generate a more valid and accurate kind of data.

Interviews "on the move" are also an increasingly popular mobile method particularly suitable to study people's relationship with space. They are a combination of participant observation and interviewing while accompanying the interviewees during their daily activities with the purpose of exploring the role and meaning of place. In a renowned paper, Kusenbach (2003) stresses the uniqueness of the "go-along" in grasping social phenomena in their natural development. Underlying her argument is the idea that traditional – "static" – interviews are insufficient to capture the unfolding of everyday practices especially for two reasons. The first reason is that informants do not normally formulate thoughts about daily habitual practices, which often do not figure in their consciousness; the second reason is the focus of interviews on talk rather than the experience as it unfolds in space and time. Instead, go-alongs might offer the opportunity to combine the direct observation of the subjects' spatial practices with the immediate exploration of their experiences and interpretations (Kusenbach 2003, p.463). This is expected to enhance the chances of grasping people's

perceptions, emotions and interpretations that are usually kept private. During a go-along, the space is not only matter of investigation, but it works also as a prompt to discussion (Jones et al. 2008). Moreover, Carpiano (2009) has stressed that go-alongs help balancing power relations between interviewer and interviewee because the latter is in charge of showing his or her world to the "outsider" researcher. In addition, the technique provided him with the opportunity to establish greater rapport with local communities, to meet a larger number of residents in the neighbourhood and observe the unfolding of their social life.

Given its intrinsic mobile character, participatory photography (also called "photo-mapping", "participant-photography" or "auto-photography") should be included among the mobile methods. Certainly, it represents a renowned and long-established technique among studies of people's everyday life (Gotschi et al. 2009; Johnsen et al. 2008; Pink 2011; Radley & Taylor 2003; Radley et al. 2005). Participatory photography means that respondents are asked to take photos of places representative of their everyday life or of any other specific topic/environment under investigation for a definite number of days; then the photos are normally used to elicit information during a follow-up interview, usually asking what the photos represent and why they have been taken. The purpose of using visual materials is to evoke different kinds of data compared to the ones produced by words only. In addition, it is a way for researchers to look at the context under study through the eyes of the research subjects. As Johnsen et al. (2008) have argued, "photographs act as tangible resources helping research participants to tell a narrative about themselves (and their everyday geographies) that retains a concrete sense of social and personal context" (p.195). The approach taken in this research has been influenced by two relevant studies that used participant photography to explore homelessness and patients' recovery in a hospital ward (Radley & Taylor 2003; Radley et al. 2005). In the latter study, the authors explain that the act of taking photos is a unique engagement with the spatiality under investigation that is intrinsically and necessarily related to the respondent's narrative about such space. Participants need to reflect on their everyday worlds, think of what is worth photographing and what is representing their lives in the surrounding environment, and these actions require them to engage with the everyday in an imaginative way. The authors also explain that the objective of both studies was not the understanding of the photos but rather the "understanding *with* the photographs about the lives of the respondents concerned" (Radley et al. 2005, p.278). As these considerations suggest, auto-photography may empower the research subjects by giving them the direct opportunity to interpret and show their worlds to the researcher.

Fieldwork locations

The fieldwork was structured in two stages, the first involved designing and conducting a pilot study while the second concerned data collection in the main case study areas. The pilot study was carried out in Kingston upon Thames (London) between March and May 2012. Kingston emerged as the most cost-effective environment to undertake a pilot study by being the University borough. Indeed, it was an adequate case study area given its urban features that reflect the characteristics considered for the main case studies, namely urbanised environments with a wide range of services and facilities (more details on the pilot study are reported in the following section). With regard to the main case studies, older people's sociability, mobility and everyday life was investigated in two urban areas: the London Borough of Hackney, Brighton & Hove (East Sussex). The decision to concentrate on two areas rather than on a higher number stemmed from considerations about time availability and level of depth of the investigation that the researcher wanted to attain. In other words, given the time frame allowed for a PhD project it was concluded that undertaking the research in two locations might have benefitted the study thanks to the opportunity to spend more time in each area. The decision turned out to be effective as it afforded the researcher the time necessary to explore the cities and the services available to older people, to visit a higher number of centres and amenities, to investigate in more depth issues related to sociability and to recruit more participants in each area than it would have been possible otherwise.

Concerning the London study, only one borough was chosen for practical purposes given the large area covered by the whole city. To be more precise, London is divided in 33 boroughs but the research concentrated only on Hackney because such delimitation enabled the analysis of older people's activities and experiences in the same local authority, making the analysis more consistent. The recruitment of individuals in dispersed locations within the whole city would not have allowed the same depth of research with regard to how the local environment influences older people's daily experiences outdoors. Moreover, as mentioned below, the population size of Hackney is similar to that of the second case study area. In other words, the borough of Hackney has similar population density and characteristics of a city. Nonetheless, the two locations differ in terms of physical characteristics, in particular in the area size, as Hackney is 19 km^2 while Brighton & Hove is 88 km^2, with implications on older people's mobility. Indeed, the distance between borders in Hackney is smaller than in

Brighton & Hove, and therefore older people living in Portslade by Sea (West border of Brighton & Hove) need to cover a longer distance to reach Rottingdean in the Eastern border of Brighton compared to older people in the London borough. In the selection phase, Hackney was chosen for two main reasons. First, the percentage of older people in the borough is relatively low compared to the other London boroughs, and this was important to explore possible interrelations between an age-mixed environment and quality of life in old age. At the time of writing, Hackney was one of the youngest boroughs of London in terms of demographics:

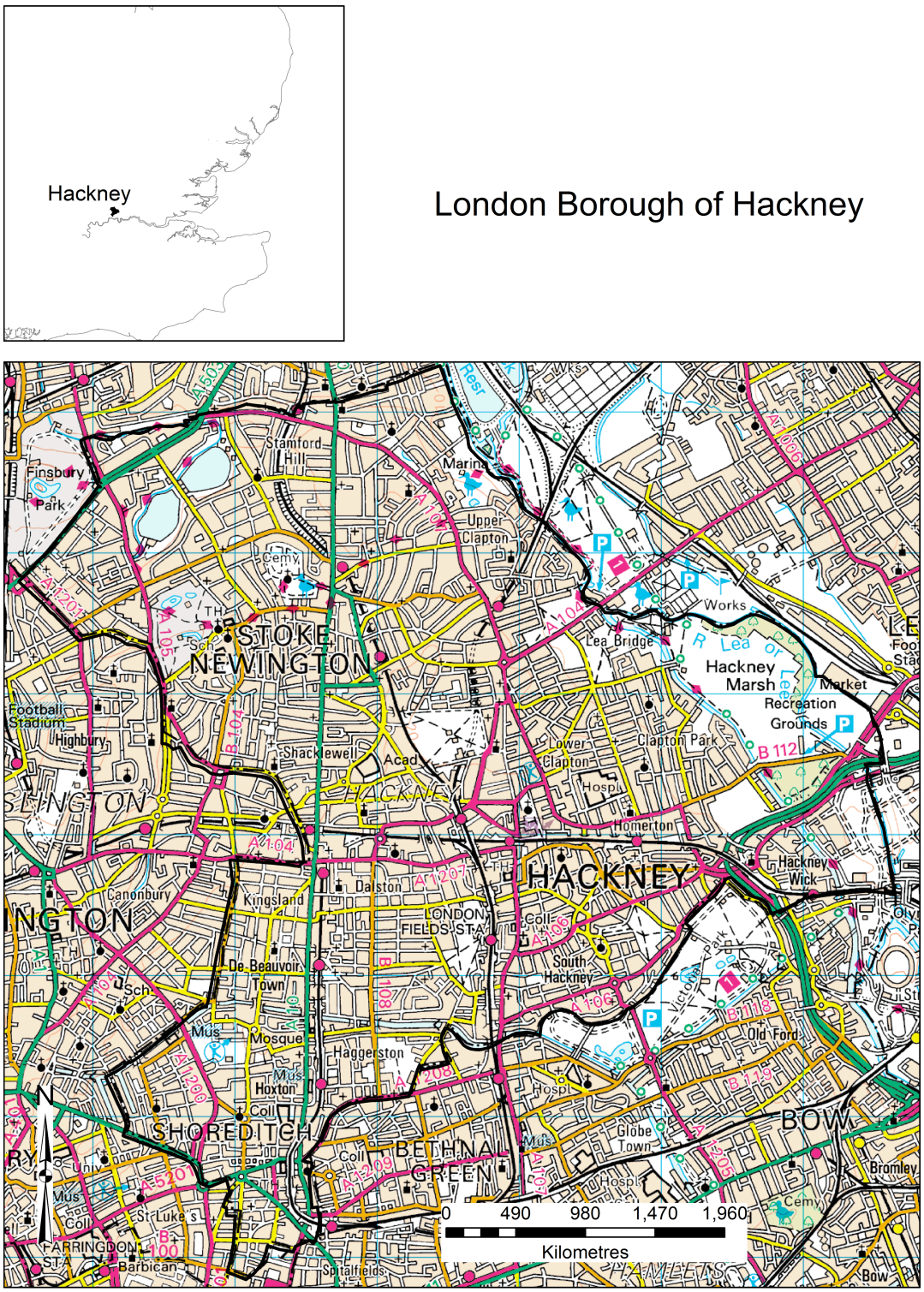
> "Hackney's population is estimated at 246,300 people. Hackney is a relatively young borough with a quarter of its population under 20. The proportion of residents between 20-29 years has grown in the last ten years and now stands at 23%. People aged over 55 make up only 14% of the population." (LB Hackney Policy Team 2013, p.3)

A second reason for choosing Hackney was the element of contrast between economic growth and social deprivation. This has been accentuated by the regeneration process that led to the development of specific areas whilst other areas maintained high deprivation levels. Official figures state that Hackney has seen a recent resurgence thanks to an increased focus on East London as a site of economic development for London and the UK; however, it remains the second most deprived local authority overall in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 (LB Hackney Policy Team 2013). By being the 6th most diverse borough in London in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, Hackney represented the ideal case study to investigate how the older population experiences the diversity of cities.

As a second case study, Brighton & Hove was chosen for four reasons. First, it presented similarities with the capital in terms of urban life. Although smaller in dimension and population in comparison to the city of London (i.e., not in comparison only to Hackney), Brighton & Hove has a population of 273,400 according to the population data from the 2011 Census, i.e. just slightly higher than the population of Hackney. It is also a cosmopolitan city renowned for its vibrant and lively atmosphere, with a good range of cultural and recreational activities. Second, the city is by the sea on the South East coast of the UK, in between Eastbourne and Hastings on the East and Worthing and Bognor Regis on the West, which are some of the most popular resort destinations among older people in England. However, the

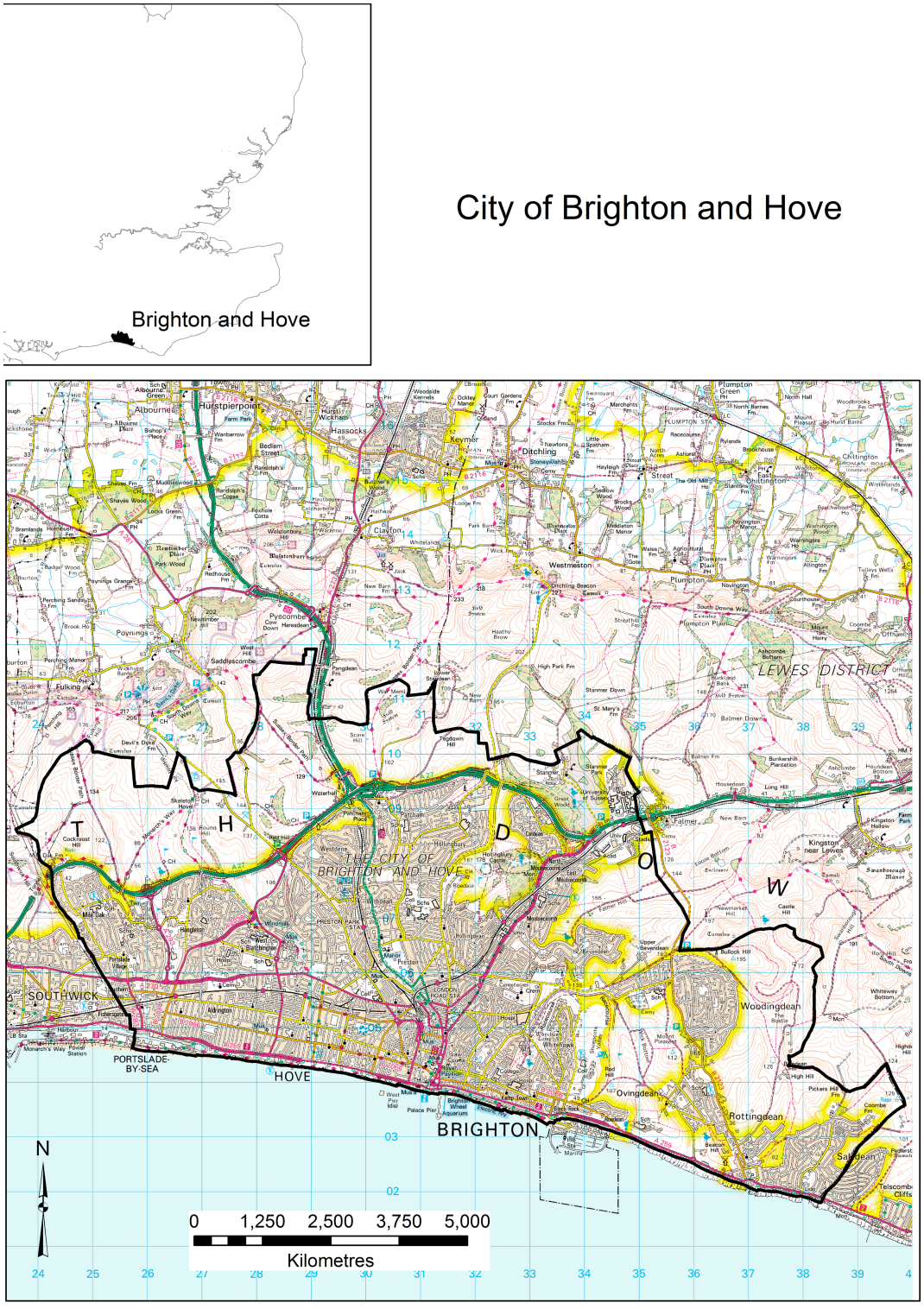
liveliness of Brighton & Hove differentiates it from its neighbouring towns, as it attracts a young people thanks to the Universities and to the reputation of the city as a place where diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation is welcomed and valued. However, the diversity of the city is accompanied by high levels of deprivation according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010, which ranks it as the 70th most deprived district in England and the 3rd in the South-East, with level of overall deprivation above the national average (Sussex Community Foundation 2013). The fact that the percentage of older people is higher in the surrounding urban settlements alongside the coast than Brighton & Hove was a further reason for choosing Brighton, as the objective was to select an area with a relatively mixed population. The opportunity to investigate older people's considerations about living in the most cosmopolitan city among the coastal resorts was a further significant aspect of this area. Lastly, financial costs related to fieldwork and the daily commuting time from Kingston upon Thames in South West London had to be considered in the selection of the case study areas, and Brighton & Hove was a feasible location in consideration of budget and time constraints.

Figure 1 – London Borough of Hackney, perimeter of Local Authority marked by black line



Source: Topography [GML2 geospatial data], Scale 1:1250, Tiles: GB, Updated: December 2013, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>, Downloaded: Wed May 07 11:55:10 BST 2014

Figure 2 – City of Brighton & Hove, perimeter of Local Authority marked by black line



Source: Topography [GML2 geospatial data], Scale 1:1250, Tiles: GB, Updated: December 2013, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>, Downloaded: Wed May 07 11:55:10 BST 2014

Figure 3 - City of Brighton & Hove, city centre

Brighton and Hove, city centre

Source: Topography [GML2 geospatial data], Scale 1:1250, Tiles: GB, Updated: December 2013, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>, Downloaded: Wed May 07 11:55:10 BST 2014

Pilot study

Objectives, recruitment and research methods

The pilot study was motivated by three major aims, specifically the assessment of the research methods, the recognition of organisational and practical issues and the identification of key themes that may have guided the literature review of the thesis. The specific objectives were to test the conditions of the technical equipment (GPS units and digital cameras, see Appendix 1 for details on the devices) and to trial the effectiveness of the following research methods:

- *GPS tracking* to explore older people's mobility patterns
- *Participatory photography* to elicit information during interviews through visual materials. Participants were also required to write notes about the photos taken on a notebook
- *Semi-structured in-depth interviews* had three main objectives:
  - to receive feedback about the experience of undertaking the work
  - to discuss issues originating from their photos and notes
  - to assess the effectiveness of thematic interview questions that would have been asked to every participant also in the main study

The pilot study commenced on March 13th 2012 and terminated on May 4th. It involved six people aged 65 and over who normally go outdoors independently. Contacts were made with the director of Age Concern Kingston upon Thames. At the first meeting, the director of the centre asked the researcher to prepare a poster describing the project to allow the people interested to sign up. By doing so, the users of the centre could not be approached personally by the researcher. This passive waiting prevented trust and familiarity between the users of the centre and the researcher to develop from an early stage. After one week from advertising the poster, a meeting was organised to invite the four people who expressed an interest in the project. Three people attended the meeting and eventually two of them decided to participate. The recruitment of participants was a difficult process and took a long time for several reasons. First, waiting without having the opportunity to visit the centre and talk informally to the users hindered a quicker recruitment strategy. Second, many users of the centre claimed

to be put off by the technology that they would have to use as part of the study (i.e., a GPS and a digital camera). In addition, a few people agreed to participate but then changed their mind, and two of the participants who eventually took part asked to undertake the tasks towards the end of the month because of other previously arranged commitments. One woman expressed strong interest in the research and although she did not want to use the equipment she asked to be interviewed and to be allowed to keep a diary of the week. At that stage, the methods were still under elaboration and the researcher aimed to be receptive to older people's reluctance or enthusiasm towards different possibilities. For this reason, it was agreed to trial a simpler combination of diary-writing and interview exclusively with that participant. Two other people were recruited during subsequent informal visits to the centre, while a last person was recruited informally at the Kingston Environment Centre during a gardening activity that involved older volunteers.

Participants were given an information sheet, a consent form (see Appendix 2), one list of instructions for the equipment and one with guidelines for taking photos, a GPS with three batteries, a digital camera and a notebook. They were asked to carry the GPS unit and the camera for one week every time they went out and about anywhere for any reasons. They started on different days of the week according to their availability but they all undertook the process for seven days. They were expected to switch the GPS on each day as they were about to leave their home for the first time and to switch it off only when they were back home with no intention of going out again. For instance, if a person went out in the morning, then went back home for lunch and went out again in the afternoon, the GPS would have been left on during lunch time and would have been switched off only when back home in the evening. This was aimed at simplifying the task as much as possible and to minimise the risk of forgetting to switch on or off the GPS. In addition, participants had to photograph significant places of their everyday life, meaningful spaces where they feel happy or unhappy. They were required to take between 10 and 20 photos during the entire week and to write some notes about each photo in the notebook. The result of combining data from GPS and a digital camera is that photos are geo-tagged and can be visualised on a map on the computer thanks to the software Sony PMB Portable (see Appendix 3). Once the participant returned the camera and the GPS, the researcher inserted the memory card of the camera into the GPS, which matched the photos with the track logs automatically. Then, photos and GPS track logs were transferred on the researcher's laptop and were opened using the software mentioned above. The equipment was collected from each participant and transferred subsequently on the

researcher's computer without the subject being present to allow some time to look at the photos before the interview. However, this strategy was changed at an early stage of the main phase of data collection, as it will be explained in the section "Research methods", p.57. Finally, one semi-structured in-depth interview was undertaken with each participant after the seven days of doing the process with GPS and camera. The six participants agreed to digitally record the conversations, which have been transcribed immediately after each interview. One interview took place in a quiet room at the Environment Centre; the others were arranged at Age Concern Kingston that was always very noisy and lively. Although this created problems with the records, it did not distract the participants from the discussion. At all interviews the informants had the opportunity to discuss their photos by looking at them on the researcher's laptop.

Considerations from the pilot study

The most significant benefit of undertaking the pilot study was that it highlighted strengths and limitations of the research methods and it informed their partial revision. Involving older people in the design of the research methods proved essential in producing a mixed-methods approach that was enjoyed by the participants who took part in the following phase of data collection. An advantage that emerged by using mixed methods was older people's direct involvement in the collection of data, because it prompted them to reflect on their experiences of navigating public spaces while they participated in the study. This enabled them to attend the interview conscious of considerations and experiences that they wanted to share. In addition, particularly effective was the use of photos to elicit discussions during interviews. On the other hand, the pilot also highlighted several challenges. First, many people who had been approached at the community centre were put off by the equipment due to privacy-related concerns or to a lack of confidence in using the devices. In addition, it was not possible to determine whether or how participants modified their journeys because of the GPS. In this regard, the researcher was very clear about the focus of the project on ordinary life, reassuring the subjects that they were not required to do anything out of ordinary and that it would not have been possible to look at every place visited in great detail. During the follow-

up interviews, participants were asked whether they changed the usual activity patterns and they all claimed to have forgotten that they were carrying the GPS and because of that they did not change their regular activities. Another challenge was represented by the use of the equipment among those who were confident with it. About the GPS, at times they forgot to change the batteries so the records were incomplete. With regard to the camera, two people did not manage to take any photos as they did not use it appropriately and two other participants took more than 30 photos. Difficulties in the use of the devices did not appear to be age or gender related but depended on personal curiosity and confidence. The pilot study was very useful in identifying such issue and it led to the refinement of the technique. As a result, for the main study it was decided to spend more time with each individual to explain how to use the devices and to try them together outdoors until they felt confident. In the notebook, participants were expected to write details about each photo, yet they found it difficult to write notes as they were on the go. Instead, they preferred writing daily notes in the form of a diary at the end of every day; however, no notes were taken for some days as at times the subjects forgot about the task.

Participants suggested reducing the number of tasks to be undertaken because the workload was too intense. Hence, it was decided to eliminate the writing of daily notes as a method of research for the main study because four people did not enjoy that. It also emerged that undertaking one interview with each subject did not afford the time to explore in depth the interrelations between biography and personality on one side and spatial and social experiences on the other. To overcome this limitation and to take further the engagement of the research with mobile methods, it was decided to add a go-along with each participant in the following case study areas, i.e. an interview "on the move" during the week of participation in the project. Go-alongs were expected to encourage discussions *in situ*, easing participants' experience of talking about their outdoor social practices. Content analysis of the interviews' transcripts led to the identification of some recurring themes in participants' experiences and it confirmed the appropriateness of the research questions. It also enabled appropriate changes to the list of predefined questions that would have been asked during the semi-structured interviews in the following case studies (see Appendix 4).

The main data collection phase

Recruitment, selection and sample of participants

The main phase of data collection took place between September 2012 and June 2013. The research was undertaken in Hackney from early September to the end of December 2012 and in Brighton & Hove from January to the end of March 2013. Then, during April, May and June 2013 the research continued in both locations. This structure reflected an attempt to consider seasonality in people's activity and to prevent winter or summer weather from impacting on the research data.

The study involved the recruitment of 50 people over 60 years old, 25 in Hackney and 25 in Brighton & Hove. Although there is no clear agreement in the gerontological literature with regard to when old age actually begins and it is recognised that great differences may characterise people within this wide age group, a definition of "older people" based on age was necessary in order to identify the sample of participants. 60 years old was selected as a reasonable minimum age, similar to other research on ageing and in line with institutions such as the World Health Organization and the Office for National Statistics. Moreover, people in England have access to a free bus pass at 60 years old and this encourages their mobility activity. As a requirement to participate, the subjects could not be employed and this was meant to afford them similar amount of available free time, as their outdoor activities were not constrained by job routines (regular volunteering works were considered acceptable as they indicated a deliberate decision to be involved with civic life after retirement). Another requirement was overall independence in terms of mobility and capability to undertake daily tasks without the help of other people. This did not necessarily lead to an exclusionary recruitment process on the basis of health, as the sample included also older people with some moderate physical impairments and health issues. Moreover, the sample of participants did not include only older people engaged in a variety of activities (i.e., those who would define themselves as "active" or "busy"). Nonetheless, the subjects had to be individuals who went out and about at least for basic trips during the week such as to the food store. In addition, the selection of participants depended on gender ratio, age mixing, social

composition and geographical distribution within the study areas. The aim was to gather a balanced and varied sample of people, as far as time constraints and related economic costs to undertake fieldwork allowed. With regard to gender ratio, 13 females and 12 males were recruited in both areas. Often in gerontological research the number of female participants exceeds the number of males, since women normally frequent socio-recreational places more than men and this makes it easier for researchers to access women. However, in this study a significant number of men were recruited thanks to snowball sampling, i.e. existing subjects put the researcher in contact with friends and acquaintances that might have been suitable for the study. About age mixing, the sample counts:

- 12 people between 60 and 64 years old
- 17 people between 65 and 69 years old
- 13 people between 70 and 74 years old
- 4 people between 75 and 79 years old
- 4 people between 80 and 90 years old

Indeed, it was easier to find participants between 60 and 74 years old mostly because of health-related reasons and visibility, given that older people in their late 70s or 80s tend to access socio-recreational places less frequently than the others. The survey included indirect information that provided a picture of the person's socio-economic situation, i.e. education levels, previous jobs, type of residence and tenancy. The social mix that characterises the sample is the result of visits to varied places that enabled the researcher to meet people from different backgrounds. As far as geographical distribution is concerned, in Brighton & Hove the participants' residences were quite spread within the area, whereas in Hackney they were less dispersed because several people lived nearby a particular leisure centre where 15 people were recruited (although not all 15 lived in proximity to the centre). Both in Hackney and Brighton & Hove, 3 partners of existing participants expressed their interest in taking part, which means that there are 6 married couples in the total sample. In such cases, the researcher made sure that the partners interested were involved in different things and that some aspects of their lives differed, e.g. their sociability patterns, activities, outings purposes. Appendix 5 maps the distribution of participants' residential locations in the two areas.

Ideally, the sample of participants would have been ethnically mixed. However, efforts to involve older people from different ethnic backgrounds were overall ineffective because the centres that were contacted during fieldwork were frequented mostly by UK citizens of

British origins. A Methodist Church and two centres frequented by people from the Caribbean community were visited during informal activities (i.e., a coffee morning, a luncheon and a bingo) and one Caribbean organisation contacted by telephone. However, the unresponsiveness of those people approached combined with time constraints dissuaded the researcher from persisting in the recruitment of older people with diverse ethnic origins. The final ethnic composition of the sample is the following:

- 44 people born in the UK (19 in Hackney and 25 in Brighton & Hove, including 4 participants born in Scotland and 1 in Wales)
- 1 person born in Hong Kong from Scottish family
- 1 person born in India from British family
- 1 person born in India from Indian family
- 1 person born in Jamaica from Jamaican family
- 1 person born in Norway from Norwegian family
- 1 person born in The Netherlands from Dutch family

All the subjects born outside the UK moved to the country in their childhood or youth. The recruitment of participants was a long process that continued during the course of the whole fieldwork because the absence of key-contacts impeded the quick identification of potential volunteers in both locations. The recruiting strategy developed in the following phases: first, desk research helped finding key-recreational places frequented by older people; second, the researcher visited such places and introduced herself to managers or users according to the nature of the place; third, the researcher joined some activities whenever considered appropriate and visited the place repeatedly to encourage trust and familiarity with the users; finally, those people who might meet the criteria for the project were approached. In both areas the researcher visited community centres, leisure centres that offered activities for the over 50s, the local Age UK centres, organisations and church groups; she joined organised group-walks, bingo evenings, luncheons and similar events with the purpose of familiarising with the people who joined the events. Potential participants were not found at all places visited because many of such places attracted less mobile and very frail individuals. Nevertheless, the attempts were productive because the users of the centre provided information about other places that catered for older people in the area that were not advertised on the web and therefore were more difficult to discover. In addition to joining activities and visiting a variety of recreational places, an effective way to find other possible

participants was through the contacts provided by the existing ones, i.e. "snowballing technique". As mentioned above, the recruitment continued alongside the entire process of data collection. Although this was an unpredictable and slow route, it had the practical advantage of reducing the risks of people signing in and dropping out after a few weeks because of a long waiting time between the day a person decided to participate and the day he or she started. In this regard it must be stressed that only four GPS units and four digital cameras were available, with obvious restrictions in the number of people who could undertake the process at the same time. However, the small amount of equipment available turned out to be suitable as it enabled the researcher to manage the different stages of data collection in the most accurate way. It would have been very difficult to manage more than four people at the time given that the mixed-methods adopted required spending a considerable amount of time with each person and that the identification and recruitment of participants continued while others were undertaking the process. In addition to difficulties in finding suitable recreational places beyond those advertised on the web, another aspect that slowed down the recruitment and data collection phase was that several people agreed to participate but then withdrew before the seven days-process started, and three participants started the process but then decided to interrupt it after the first few days. These three subjects claimed that they enjoyed the research activities but they had been encouraged to quit by their grown-up children, who appeared to worry for their parents' health or safety.

The recruitment strategy differed slightly in the two case study areas, as it adapted to context specific opportunities that emerged during fieldwork. More precisely, contacts in Hackney were made mostly by visiting a variety of places and the research was supported in particular by the team of a centre that organises activities for older people which provided several participants. Other subjects were recruited through word of mouth as existing participants mentioned the research to interested friends. Instead, in Brighton & Hove the researcher first contacted the Council, which advertised the research on a mailing list. As a result, two older women sent an email to the researcher expressing their interest in taking part. It is important to stress that it was entirely their decision to contact the researcher and this fact highlights the curiosity of some older people about research on old age and quality of life and their desire to engage with unfamiliar activities and people. Moreover, in Brighton the research was presented at the Older People's Council monthly meeting and at the Pensioners' Group meeting where three people were then recruited at both events. Further people were recruited during two public group-walks organised by the Council, which were a very

effective way to meet older people in an informal way and to present the research at the end of the walk. Other participants were recruited by word of mouth (however considerably less than in Hackney), at community centres and during informal gatherings in two churches.

The table in the following page provide details on the research subjects, whose names have been changed to respect their anonymity as will be explained later in this chapter. It includes information on the deprivation of the area drawn from the Index of Multiple Deprivation of 2010 (UK Government 2014). The index calculates deprivation by pulling together the scores from seven domains, i.e. income, employment, health and disability, education and training, barriers to housing, living environment and crime. The codes in the table range from 1 to 5, with 1 being the least deprived and 5 the most deprived. This reflects the index codes that use the values for all 34,482 Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOA) and that change at 20%, 40%, 60% and 80% of the distribution. It appears that 56% of Hackney respondents reside in areas coded as 5 and 44% as 4, highlighting the overall high deprivation of the borough. In Brighton & Hove, 36% of participants live in areas coded as 4 while only 12% live in the most deprived areas (code 5). In Brighton & Hove, 32% of respondents live in areas coded as 3, 12% as 2. Only 1 person (4%) lives in an area coded as the least deprived (code 1). Two further tables detail recruitment routes, i.e. the places visited and the events attended by the researcher both in Hackney and Brighton & Hove. They list names of organisations, describe concisely the activities undertaken by the researcher, and report the number of people recruited (by gender). The column "Snowball" shows the number of people recruited through contacts previously made. These people were either friends or husbands/wives of those people recruited in each place. A snowballing technique was considered as a valuable method to reduce a bias in the sample because it allowed access to individuals who were not necessarily involved in activities or did not belong to the organisations but nonetheless had an active lifestyle. Table 2 regards Hackney and lists only 23 people because one person was identified through the researcher's personal acquaintances. The other person not included in the table was a friend of his. Also Table 3 regarding participants in Brighton & Hove lists 23 individuals. This is because a Hackney participant suggested one subject in Brighton to the researcher. The Brighton resident was first contacted by her friend in Hackney and she agreed to take part, then she involved her husband. Thus, this couple is missing from the table because they were not contacted through any organisation or friends in Brighton & Hove. The tables do not report the places visited in chronological order; rather, they list the places where people were recruited and secondly follow the places where no one was recruited.

Table 1 – Details of 50 participants

N	NAME	AREA	AGE	YEARS IN THE AREA	LIVING ALONE	RELATIVES	MARITAL STATUS	EDUCATION	PREVIOUS JOB	DEPRIVATION	RESIDENCE
1	Jack	HA	69	38	N	Y	Divorced	Master or PhD	/	4	Private flat
2	Amelia	HA	60	34	Y	N	Single	Other	Teacher	5	Private flat
3	Benjamin	HA	65	33	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	Professor	4	Private flat
4	Chloe	HA	66	15	N	Y	Married	Left at school at 18	Secretary	4	Terraced house
5	Alice	HA	71	29	N	Y	Married	Bachelor degree	Consultant	5	Terraced house
6	Mia	HA	68	28	N	Y	Married	Vocational qualific.	Teacher	5	Terraced house
7	Holly	HA	68	39	Y	Y	Divorced	Other	Administrator	5	Terraced house
8	Joseph	HA	65	31	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	Manager	4	Terraced house
9	Daisy	HA	66	44	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Meal supervisor	5	Terraced house
10	Alexander	HA	63	15	Y	Y	Single	Vocational qualific.	Administrator	5	Other
11	Nathan	HA	68	29	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	Manager	5	Other
12	Matilda	HA	76	23	Y	Y	Single	Left at school at 18	Civil servant	5	Terraced house
13	Charlotte	HA	63	18	N	Y	Married	Bachelor degree	Librarian	4	Private flat
14	Freddie	HA	63	18	Y	Y	Divorced	Left school at 14-16	General labour	4	Terraced house
15	Megan	HA	64	37	N	Y	Divorced	Vocational qualific.	Teacher	4	Private flat
16	Luke	HA	62	18	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	Journalist	4	Terraced house
17	Evan	HA	85	40	Y	Y	Divorced	Bachelor degree	Teacher	5	Terraced house
18	Martin	HA	72	28	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Postman	5	Private flat
19	Amy	HA	72	20	N	Y	Married	Vocational qualific.	Secretary	4	Terraced house
20	Ben	HA	72	72	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Social worker	5	Terraced house
21	Robert	HA	72	40	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	Consultant	5	Semi-det. house
22	Annabelle	HA	68	/	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	Counsellor	5	Terraced house
23	Amber	HA	79	30	N	Y	Divorced	Vocational qualific.	Teacher	5	Terraced house
24	Edward	HA	70	70	N	Y	Married	Other	Engineer	4	Terraced house
25	Zoe	HA	60	30	N	Y	Single	Other	Teacher	4	Private flat
26	Rebecca	B&H	62	25	N	Y	Widowed	Bachelor degree	Lab technician	4	Semi-det. house
27	Stanley	B&H	81	80	Y	Y	Widowed	Bachelor degree	Part time judge	2	Private det. house
28	Lily	B&H	71	4	Y	Y	Divorced	Left school at 14-16	Officer	5	Private flat
29	Emily	B&H	68	34	N	Y	Divorced	Bachelor degree	Teacher	3	Terraced house
30	Sophie	B&H	80	15	Y	Y	Married	Bachelor degree	Psychologist	3	Private flat
31	Grace	B&H	64	47	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Administrator	3	Terraced house
32	Patrick	B&H	77	40	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Plumber	1	Private det. house
33	Lucy	B&H	67	37	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	Teacher	4	Semi-det. house
34	Penelope	B&H	64	30	N	Y	Married	Bachelor degree	Librarian	2	Semi-det. house
35	Oliver	B&H	65	30	N	Y	Married	Master or PhD	IT manager	2	Semi-det. house
36	Hannah	B&H	72	30	Y	Y	Divorced	Bachelor degree	Manager	4	Private flat
37	Jacob	B&H	90	22	Y	N	Divorced	Left school at 14-16	Civil servant	4	Private flat
38	Matthew	B&H	70	35	N	Y	Married	Bachelor degree	Librarian	3	Private det. house
39	Isabelle	B&H	63	37	N	Y	Divorced	Other	Carer, landlady	5	Terraced house
40	Isaac	B&H	69	15	N	Y	Married	Bachelor degree	IT manager	4	Terraced house
41	Rose	B&H	59	18	Y	N	Single	Left school at 14-16	Cleaner	3	Retirement house
42	Max	B&H	69	50	Y	N	Married	Other	Teacher	4	Private flat
43	Charlie	B&H	72	72	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Bus driver	3	Semi-det. house
44	William	B&H	70	37	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Machinist	4	Semi-det. house
45	Harriet	B&H	72	38	N	Y	Married	Vocational qualific.	Sales assistant	4	Semi-det. house
46	Eve	B&H	67	67	N	Y	Married	Left at school at 18	Librarian	4	Private det. house
47	Iris	B&H	79	22	N	Y	Widowed	Left at school at 18	PR officer	3	Private flat
48	George	B&H	74	54	N	Y	Married	Left school at 14-16	Postman	4	Semi-det. house
49	Alex	B&H	71	37	Y	Y	Single	Other	Teacher	5	Private flat
50	Daniel	B&H	65	40	Y	Y	Single	Left at school at 18	Occasional jobs	/	Private flat

Table 2 – Organisations visited and events attended as part of the recruitment process in Hackney

	Organisation	***Description***	***M***	***F***	***Snowball***
1	The Sharp End – activities for the 50+	Several meetings with coordinators, Several informal visits before/during/after structured activities	**5**	**6**	**1** wife **1** husband **1** friend F
2	Queen's Bridge Leisure Centre	Several informal visits before/after structured activities	**1**	**2**	0
3	Stamford Hill Library – U3A Creative Writing class	Presentation of the research to the class participants	0	**1**	0
4	The Factory Community Project	Joined the Asian Elderly Luncheon and the International Elderly Luncheon, Joined bingo with Jamaican old men	**1**	0	**1** friend F
5	Hackney Council – Health Programme for the 50+	Meeting with programme coordinator, Joined event "Fit 4 Health – Exercise After Stroke Scheme – Feedback Day"	0	**1**	**1** husband
6	Hackney Older People's Reference Group	Joined public event "Ending Loneliness and Isolation Amongst Older People"	**1**	0	0
7	Morningside Centre	Informal visit	0	0	0
8	The Salvation Army	Informal visit	0	0	0
9	MildMay Community Centre	Several informal visits, Joined bingo night	0	0	0
10	Nightingale Centre	Informal visit	0	0	0
11	Hackney Caribbean Elderly Org.	Meeting with director of organisation	0	0	0
12	Methodist Church	Informal visit to during coffee morning organised by the Caribbean community	0	0	0
13	Claudia Jones Organisation – for African Caribbean families	Contact by telephone	0	0	0
14	Community garden	Informal visit	0	0	0
15	Volunteer Centre Hackney	Meeting with director	0	0	0
16	Age UK Hackney	Meeting with director	0	0	0
17	Shoreditch Healthy Living Centre	Informal visit	0	0	0

Table 3 – Organisations visited and events attended as part of the recruitment process in Brighton & Hove

	Organisation	***Description***	***M***	***F***	***Snowball***
1	Older People's Council	Research presented at the Older People's Council monthly meeting	**1**	**2**	**4** friends M **1** wife
2	Brighton & Hove Council - newsletter	Project advertised on a newsletter with the researcher's contact details	**0**	**2**	**1** friend M
3	Pensioners' Association	Research presented at the Pensioners' Association meeting	**1**	**1**	0
4	Under cliff Health-Walk, Council and NHS	Joined a morning public walk	**2**	**1**	0
5	Patcham Health-Walk, Council and NHS	Joined a morning public walk	**1**	0	**1** friend M
6	Hollingbury Community Centre	Informal visit	0	**1**	**1** friend F
7	Portslade City Coast Christian Church	Joined a luncheon and informal activities	0	**1**	0
8	The Salvation Army	Informal visit at the café area	0	**1**	0
9	Cornerstone Community Centre	Several informal visits	0	**1**	0
10	St. John's Community Centre	Informal visit	0	0	0
11	Brighthelm 60+	Joined a luncheon, Several informal visits	0	0	0
12	Age UK Brighton & Hove	Contacted by email and telephone	0	0	0
13	Community Base	Informal visit to speak with personnel	0	0	0

Research methods

Similar to the pilot study, participants were given an information sheet, a consent form, a list of instructions for the equipment, a GPS with three batteries and a digital camera. However, they were not given the sheet with guidelines for taking photos and the notebook as it will be explained in the section on photography as a research method (p.60). One consideration that emerged from the pilot study was the effectiveness of dedicating the time necessary to each participant to explain how to use the equipment. In addition, explaining the research and the use of the devices to each person separately encouraged more intimacy that allowed individuals to ask questions without possible embarrassment caused by the presence of other people. Therefore, the research was never explained to more than one person at a time during this stage of data collection. Meetings were always arranged in quiet places that were normally chosen by the subject. In the majority of the cases people proposed to meet at cafés, libraries or at their houses, the latter being also where most interviews took place.

Survey – personal information and weekly chart

Participants were given a questionnaire that aimed to collect background information together with two charts in which they were required to tick the places visited, the modes of transport used and the reasons to go outdoors for every day of the week, a sort of simplified activity-diary (see Appendix 6). The idea of a "diary-chart" stemmed from the results of the pilot as people did not enjoy taking notes for every photo taken, and those people who instead preferred to write general daily notes in the form of a diary claimed that the set of tasks was excessive. Since the collection of information on the places visited during the week was important, it was decided that a chart would have been perceived as less burdensome and it would have provided also quantifiable data useful for undertaking statistical analysis. The majority of participants meticulously filled in the chart every day, even adding places that were not listed in it. Such places were then added to the final database that was used to analyse all the data gathered. However, eight participants forgot about the charts, which were filled in with the researcher at the interview after completion of the seven days-process.

GPS tracking

GPS tracking was used as a method of research also for the main study because the peculiar visualisation of people's spatial movements combined with the photographs provided an interesting prompt for discussions with the interviewees during the pilot (Appendix 3). The overall objective was to combine geospatial technology with mobile methods, given that only a limited number of studies had done so at the time of undertaking fieldwork and the interest in such methods was growing (see Jones & Evans 2012). In comparison to the pilot study, the number of people who decided not to take part because of the GPS was considerably lower in the two main case studies. This may be related to the increased amount of time spent by the researcher with each participant individually to explain the activities, which fostered subjects' confidence with the devices, and also to the greater investment in building trust and familiarity with the groups of older people before introducing the project.

The instructions on how to use the GPS during the seven days were the same as the ones used during the pilot; however, participants could decide whether to switch the GPS off every time they were indoors for more than an hour in between daily journeys. The GPS needed to be switched on when they navigated the public spaces outdoors, but it was not essential to keep it on when they were indoors as the radio signals from the GPS satellites would not have reached the GPS unit anyway. Many participants preferred to switch it off when they were indoors for a long time in order to save battery, given that they were confident in remembering to switch it on and off according to the circumstances. On average, if a person left the GPS on from the morning to the evening the battery would have lasted around two days. For this reason, as a general instruction it was suggested to change the battery every two days in case they were unsure about the battery status.

In contrast to the strategy adopted during the pilot, GPS track logs and photos were transferred on the researcher's laptop straight after collecting the devices from each participant, hence the subject was present and the in-depth interview was undertaken immediately after the data were uploaded. This was motivated by two reasons. First, for the pilot study the GPS track logs and the photos were examined before the interview to have a general idea of the person's data, however it was then decided to adopt a different analytical approach. By doing so, participants showed and described their photos without involving the researcher's previous examination or attempt to interpret such data (see "Analysis of photographs", p.73). Second, the researcher met each participant four times (i.e., one time to

present the research, one to give the devices and explain how to use it, one for the go-along and one for the interview), thus it was felt that asking them to meet once more to collect the devices was going to take too much of their time and may have put them off from taking part.

Similar to what emerged from the pilot, the research subjects declared not to have been influenced by the GPS in their regular journeys and activities. However, they were uncomfortable in carrying the device around the neck because of concerns about what other people might have thought when seeing them with the device. Hence, participants were let free to carry the GPS in the purse or backpack provided that it was in an external pocket so that the radio signals from the satellites would have been captured easily. The 50 participants recorded a very large volume of GPS track logs. Nevertheless, a limitation of using such device was that in almost all cases the data collected presented some gaps and this was due to two main reasons. One reason was people's failure in recognising when the battery needed to be replaced, similar to another study that has used portable GPS to investigate older people's mobility (Yen et al. 2013). This does not mean that research on the mobility activity of older people should discount GPS technology but rather that the selection of the device might depend on the duration of the battery, opting for those that do not need to be charged or are very easily rechargeable. Another reason was that even when participants used the GPS in line with the instructions, the device might interrupt the recording for no precise reason, possibly due to signalling errors or technical failures, as it has been noticed also by Jones et al. (2008). To verify this, the researcher tested the devices, which were found to report inaccurate data sporadically. The fragmentary travel data did not jeopardise the research as data were not collected with the ultimate purpose of undertaking quantitative analysis on the GPS track logs but to use them as a prompt for discussion on personal mobility during the interviews. Since this research concentrates on older people's lived experiences of sociability in public places, the qualitative methods were the most significant ones in providing insights into participants' perspectives. In their recent study on older people's mobility activity, Yen et al. (2013) claim that the "use of technology or a device can provide more reliable and quantifiable information of the locations, frequency, and duration of various activities" (p.2). However, in this study the GPS data were not considered as more reliable but rather as a tool that provided a different perspective on older people's urban mobility. In other words, the GPS was intended as a support to the investigation by generating a different kind of data from the ones generated by interviews. Using geospatial technology in combination with the photo-mapping technique was an effective way to elicit information from the research subjects. Older people enjoyed

the visualisation of their journeys in the form of a digital map on the computer and commented enthusiastically on the tracks using them to narrate about their week of participation in the research. Although the quantitative information gathered through GPS tracking were used mainly as a support for the qualitative data, they have also been used to carry out some analysis of people's movements in the urban area, i.e. in Chapter 4 the GPS track logs by all 50 participants are utilised to visualise and discuss the most frequented areas in the two cities.

Participatory photography and photo elicitation

Participants were given a digital camera for the duration of the seven days-process to take photos of public places that were meaningful to them, places representative of their everyday life or places that acquired significance because of a particular experience, places that they liked but also places that they did not like. As mentioned on p.46, the digital camera and the GPS worked together to locate the photos spatially and temporally on the computer map. Detailed guidelines on the number of photos to be taken over the course of the week were provided when fieldwork began in Hackney. However, this approach was changed after the first few participants because, on one hand, it was found to limit those who wanted to take more photos than the maximum number allowed and, on the other, it forced those who had more difficulties in thinking about meaningful places and hardly reached the minimum number required. Hence, it was decided to allow older people to take as many photos as they wanted, ensuring that they understood that they were not asked to produce a photographic diary of the week or to take photos of all places visited randomly. Instead, they were asked to reflect on the public places that were of greater significance to them both for positive or negative reasons. A wide spectrum of places was photographed, such as cafés and pubs, libraries, leisure centres, churches, museums and art galleries, green spots, parks, the sea, grocery stores, supermarkets, open markets, city landmarks, theatres and cinemas. Also train stations and bus stops were portrayed as symbolic places of connection to other places of destination. In addition, a few people not only took photos of public places but they photographed their personal cars and bicycles because they represented the possibility of independent mobility. For privacy reasons, participants were asked not to photograph people (unless unrecognisable, e.g. distant individuals or crowds). Nonetheless, some participants portrayed their relatives or friends in specific places. For example, one woman in Brighton

took a photo of her friends in a local pub while they were waiting to go to the theatre because she wanted to report the experience as an example of a pleasant social occasion. This was allowed given that the subjects consented to be photographed as part of the research. Older people did not have to worry about the quality of the photos because the interest of the research was in the meaning of the photo rather than the aesthetic aspect of it, similar to Radley's and Taylor's (2003) approach in using participants' pictures to study personal perceptions of a hospital ward. The authors claimed that "however banal the images might appear, they refer in some way to a most significant life experience for the people involved" (2003, p.84). In line with their considerations on auto-photography as a research method, this research finds that in the majority of the cases the apparent mundane aspect of the photos disappeared when the informants disclosed the significance of the place by commenting and contextualising the image. However, it also happened that a few participants admitted to have taken photos of places with no particular significance other than the object being a visually recurrent place in their everyday life but they could not articulate a specific narrative about it.

Since the decision to adopt a mixed-methods approach was driven also by the purpose of engaging with mobile methods in a critical way, this section discusses both limitations and advantages of asking participants to photograph places while being on the move. The main limitation was represented by the difficulty of some older people in using the digital camera despite the instructions and the time spent trying it with the researcher. The subjects claimed that the screen was small and the button for taking photos too hard to press. In practical terms, this meant that some people took only a few photos even when they thought they had taken more. The use of participants' personal cameras or the use of disposable cameras were considered as an alternative to the Sony digital cameras but that would have entailed abandoning the combined production of data via GPS tracking and geo-tagged photos which was one of the research objectives. However, it must be stressed that despite the technical problems the majority of the subjects managed to photograph all the places that they planned to show. A total of 488 photos were taken in Hackney with an average of 20 photos per participant (minimum number of photos taken by one person was 5 and the maximum 57), whereas in Brighton & Hove the total was 211 with an average of 8 photos per participant (minimum of photos taken by one person was 2 and the maximum 17). Another limitation related to the combined use of photos with GPS mapping, i.e. some of the photos were not geo-tagged because the battery of the GPS was over when the photo was taken and therefore no GPS records could be used by the software to identify the precise spatial location of the photo.

In these cases, the photos could not be visualised on the participant's weekly map but nonetheless they were opened on the laptop without using PMB Portable Sony software so that people could still talk about them.

Notwithstanding the technical limitations in the use of the camera, asking participants to take photos of meaningful places was indeed effective in combination with the interview. By starting the conversations from the photos rather than interview questions, the respondents felt less intimidated, they attended the meetings with the curiosity of seeing their "photographic map of the week" and with the knowledge that they would have talked about their photos. In other words, they knew what to expect and what they would have been asked to discuss, and being in control of the conversation boosted their confidence and, as a result, the successful unfolding of the interview. Moreover, photo elicitation represented a direct access into participants' everyday life thanks to the visualisation of the places they visited during the week. The opportunity to enter participants' worlds by looking at their photos afforded the researcher a privileged insightful perspective (Radley & Taylor 2003).

Go-alongs

As mentioned on p.48, go-alongs were added to the research methods in light of the considerations emerged from the pilot study. Doing a go-along meant that the researcher shadowed each volunteer during one of their ordinary journeys out and about with the purpose of eliciting spatially related information. A digital voice recorder recorded the conversations with a lapel microphone attached to the subject's jacket (see Appendix 1). The length of the go-along always varied depending in large part on participants' availabilities, health conditions and weather conditions, but they lasted between 20 minutes and just less than 2 hours. The duration of the go-along should not be interpreted as an indication of the quality of the data, as a short go-along could produce equally or even more interesting information than a longer one. Go-alongs were walking interviews in the majority of the cases, and on a few occasions they involved the use of additional modes of transports such as participant's car, buses, tube and overground, depending on what people decided to do. A whole variety of places were visited, such as parks, beach, clothes shops, greengrocers, cafés, community gardens, stations, clubs or societies. In addition, go-alongs allowed checking participants' correct use of the equipment and they were a chance for them to report about

any research-related problem. A total of 49 go-alongs were undertaken (one person did not do it due to difficulties in finding a convenient day), although five were not recorded by the digital voice recorder because of problems with the microphone. In those cases, notes were written on the research diary during or immediately after the go-along. Moreover, additional outings were organised with some participants once their contribution to the research was over. For instance, the researcher was invited to see the community allotment in Hove by two men who own a space to grow vegetables, a man in Brighton invited her for a coffee at the Royal Pavillion because he liked the atmosphere of the café and wished to share the experience, a lady in Brighton invited her for lunch in her favourite pub and this happened also with another lady in Hove. Even if not digitally recorded, this extra time spent with some participants was very useful for the researcher to experience first hand the kind of places those people enjoy and to understand the reasons why those places are important to them.

The need to reconsider the meaning of a go-along with an old person emerged as the researcher started undertaking go-alongs, as she recognised the significance of the "immobilities" that define older people's life in public spaces, which is something that the advocates of mobile methods tend to overlook (Merriman 2013). In other words, walking (or "mobility" in general) was not always a feature of the go-alongs and in a few cases no movement at all was involved. For instance, in case of miserable weather the participant might decide to stop in his or her favourite café, which was a brilliant alternative given the focus on the use of public spaces in old age. Last minute change of plans were not considered as undermining the effectiveness of the go-alongs. However, these, plus other factors that are illustrated below, problematised the nature of this method during the course of the fieldwork and questioned the assumption that go-alongs might lead to a more accurate and valid understanding of ordinary practices simply because they embed everyday activities in space (Kusenbach 2003). First of all, arranging the appointment means that the researcher influences participants' ordinary behaviours and often interrupts the natural course of the participant's day. Many informants thought about where to go and what to do in advance, at times feeling that they *had* to do something, as the following quote suggests:

> *Benjamin*: Let's make an exception to your request not to alter my normal behaviour because if you had to follow me in a typical afternoon we may just stay home as I'm not going out much these days. (65, Hackney)

Nevertheless, this statement provided some useful points to cover during the go-along, about the subject's life and his perception of it. For instance, issues to be covered related to the reasons for him not going out much, whether this was due to preference, lack of services and activities or to unfavourable weather conditions. In addition, not all participants came up with an idea of what to do and asked the researcher where to go once they met, often because they were afraid to disappoint her. In these circumstances the researcher suggested to walk around their local area and show her some places that they liked, places representative of their everyday life. These considerations question the supposed distinctiveness of the go-along as a method that looks at social phenomenon in their natural occurrence. If ideally a go-along is a way to shadow people during their ordinary daily journeys with the least possible interference of the researcher, practically it is inevitable that the presence of the researcher affects participants' experiences. Therefore, it was essential to think reflexively about it and to consider the researcher's positionality in the process of data construction, which is something that will be addressed in more detail at the end of this chapter (Degen et al. 2010; Murray 2012). Although the presence of the researcher obviously was inevitable, it also encouraged interesting data that would not have emerged otherwise, e.g. it played a role in the way passers-by or people at shops interacted with the participants and the researcher. The interplay between the older person, the researcher, other people, different spaces and objects emerged as a resource for the conversations with the participants (Murray, 2012). Another consideration is that in several cases the participants showed uncertainties and lack of confidence when prompted to talk about their area or the reasons why they like certain places. Hence, purely the act of walking in their area at the moment of speaking did not necessarily facilitate people's narratives about it or the recollection of memories. It has been claimed that:

> "Everyday activities are considered to be so embedded in space that to carry out research in another space can limit the potential of the data as it removes the immediate relationship between the participant and that emotional and social space." (Murray 2009, p.471)

Instead, this research recognises that the follow-up interview with photo elicitation were much more effective in encouraging respondents to reflect on their practices, disclose emotions and retrieve memories. However, this may have been facilitated by the fact that participants knew the researcher a bit more by the time the second interview was undertaken

and they also felt more confident with the research itself after one week of photographing and carrying the GPS. Moreover, the surrounding environment was a prompt for discussion but could also become a source of distraction from the flow of the conversation. Many times participants suddenly interrupted interesting thoughts because they spotted something or somebody. This sort of environmental interference was meaningful as the attention was turned to what was happening in the surroundings. However, most times it would have been more relevant to continue the conversation. Finally, weather and technical issues can always influence the practicalities of the go-along and the recordings can be very difficult to transcribe as the lapel microphone captures all sort of noises, e.g. road traffic and rain.

Despite these limitations, go-alongs were useful in other ways. First, they fostered intimacy, familiarity and trust, which helped the follow-up interview. Because of the enjoyable nature of the walking interview, the participants felt comfortable and the research relationship became also a social relationship. In so doing, the go-along encouraged the shifting and evolving of the participant's and researcher's identities and relationships (Newton et al. 2012). Furthermore, related to intimacy and trust, giving participants technological devices for a week meant that they were feeling trusted by the researcher and this encouraged their confidence in undertaking the process. In addition, go-alongs reverted power relations as participants could take the lead and be in control of where to go and what to do, they were the experts of their area, as stressed also by Carpiano (2009). Related to power relations, the act of walking side by side facilitated the flow of conversation because participants did not find that kind of interview as unnerving as a sit-down interview. Walking itself encouraged pondered reflection. Silent moments were not perceived as inappropriate because the act of walking filled them in with a physical action (i.e., walking) and sensory perceptions (i.e., sensing the environment through sight, hearing, smell and touch). Participants felt at ease in silence and took their time to reflect on the reasons why they preferred some sort of places, using the environment as a prompt to think about their everyday life and habits. Go-alongs also offered the opportunity to start conversations on specific issues that could be continued and developed during the follow-up interview. This was particularly useful as participants may give a second thought to something and they could discuss it at the interview. One advantage of doing two different interviews with each subject was the observation of contradictions in participants' narratives, because a different – at times opposite – answer or reaction may be given to the same question when asked again during the follow-up interview. Overall, the benefits of undertaking go-alongs have been found to relate more to the creation of intimacy

and the overturning of power relations rather than their uniqueness in grasping embodied practices and social phenomenon in their natural development (cf. Fincham et al. 2010). The superiority of this method or other more traditional methods like sit-down interviews is not contended here, but it is believed that the strength of the methodology used for this study has to be found in the interconnection of different methods, something that has been underlined also by other authors (Carpiano 2009; Murray 2009). The mixed-methods adopted for this research allowed a multidimensional approach to study older people's practices in public spaces, and the combination of go-alongs with GPS mapping, photo mapping and in-depth interviews proved very effective.

In-depth semi-structured interviews

An in-depth semi-structured interview was undertaken with each participant after he or she had terminated the seven days-process using the GPS and the camera. Normally the interview took place within a week from the termination of the process and was usually undertaken at participants' houses, quiet cafés or libraries. At the interview, the data were uploaded on the laptop and then the participants proceeded to talk about the week in which they took part at the project. Although the interview was flexible to allow informants to discuss their experiences freely, it always followed the same structure. For every picture they were asked why it had been taken and what it represented to them, and as they finished commenting on the photos they were asked whether they were happy to continue for a little longer with additional questions. The predefined set of questions was not asked to all participants and this depended on the respondents' availability and extent to which they were willing to cooperate. For instance, several interviewees discussed disparate issues very thoroughly and the interviews lasted for a long time, hence it was not necessary to continue with the questions. In other cases the respondents did not want to spend too much time doing the interview and they preferred leaving after the first part with the photos. All respondents agreed to record the conversations that were transcribed immediately after the interviews.

The obvious benefit of undertaking in-depth interviews in social research that explores people's lived experiences and personal perceptions of urban spaces is that they provide a direct entry into the perspectives of the subjects under investigation, allowing them to describe and interpret their own worlds and experiences. Because of that, intensive

interviews are a very effective method to unfold the complex and contradictory nature of people's experiences (Hoggart et al. 2002). A valuable advantage of undertaking interviews was the opportunity to enquire some specific aspects of participants' stories to deepen and broaden the understanding of interesting issues that emerged as the conversation proceeded (Kitchin & Tate 2000). Doing in-depth interviews as part of this research was essential given that the same insightful understanding of people's outdoor everyday practices would not have been gained with any other research method alone. For example, go-alongs were interviews "on the move" and the spatial references evoked different kinds of information; however, undertaking only go-alongs would not have enabled a sufficiently deep investigation of people's practices outdoors. This is because the focus of go-alongs was very much on the spatial surroundings and the present at the expense of reflections on habitual aspects of everyday life and more general, "a-spatial", thoughts. Similar to the go-along, the use of photo-elicitation and GPS tracking enhanced to a great extent the depth of analysis by providing different sorts of data, yet these methods would have been less significant if not combined with in-depth interviews. Given these considerations, the research supports Hitchings (2012) in arguing that interviews should not be abandoned only because their intrinsic static nature does not seem appropriate to capture people's mobile practices and everydayness. Instead, methodological aids should be found to help respondents reflect on such issues and possibly facilitate the interview through a variety of methods, e.g. photo-elicitation and GPS tracking-elicitation. There was indeed "initial awkwardness" (Hitchings 2012, p.6) when people realised that they needed to discuss everyday life. This is because the research participants do not need to examine their everyday constantly and they do not need rationales or explanations to live their life in one way or another. Related to this, there was also awkwardness on the side of the researcher because the formulation of questions that could be easily understood by the research subjects was difficult at times, since the way in which researchers frame their questions does not necessarily reflect the way in which respondents think about their everyday life (Latham 2003). Nevertheless, as older people were encouraged to talk about such issues, especially with the aid of photos or other supporting materials, they felt more comfortable and the majority of interviews produced remarkable data on everyday and mobile practices.

In conclusion to this section on research methods, the following two pages provide informative tables that detail the methods used with each individual. These include the length of go-alongs and interviews, the number of photos taken, and information on whether the

subjects had used the GPS and had inserted the required information in the weekly-chart and survey. With regard to the GPS data, the tables specify the participants who have recorded only three days or less; those participants may have recorded some movements on other days but the track logs are too short to identify any activity in space. All the remaining participants have recorded four days or more although with possible gaps.

Table 4 – Details of methods used on each subject in Hackney

Subject	*Go-along length*	*Interview length*	*N of photos*	*GPS records*	*Weekly-chart*	*Survey*
Jack	Not recorded	01:36:14	17	1 day	✓	✓
Amelia	Not recorded	01:39:26	19	✓	✓	✓
Benjamin	01:40:00	01:25:19	32	✓	✓	✓
Chloe	01:05:36	01:19:47	25	✓	✓	✓
Alice	01:30:10	01:11:32	17	3 days	✓	✓
Mia	01:03:16	01:15:12	20	3 days	✓	✓
Holly	00:16:11	01:40:22	12	✓	✓	✓
Joseph	Not undertaken	02:04:45	57	✓	✓	✓
Daisy	00:29:31	00:56:41	11	✓	✓	✓
Alexander	01:23:00	01:17:19	44	✓	✓	✓
Nathan	01:31:28	01:31:32	5	✓	✓	✓
Matilda	00:20:45	01:18:03	15	✓	✓	✓
Charlotte	01:11:00	01:03:04	13	✓	✓	✓
Freddie	Not recorded	01:11:01	31	✓	✓	✓
Megan	00:44:10	00:47:31	25	✓	✓	✓
Luke	00:51:36	01:30:04	18	✓	✓	✓
Evan	01:14:57	01:05:48	5	✓	✓	✓
Martin	01:26:52	01:21:42	18	✓	✓	✓
Amy	00:40:46	01:46:09	9	✓	✓	✓
Ben	Not recorded	01:24:42	10	✓	✓	✓
Robert	01:00:49	01:42:10	16	✓	✓	✓
Annabelle	00:45:00	01:20:55	7	✓	✓	✓
Amber	00:48:00	02:08:05	33	✓	✓	✓
Edward	01:03:00	02:09:16	15	✓	✓	✓
Zoe	00:53:51	01:48:40	14	✓	✓	✓

Table 5 – Details of methods used on each subject in Brighton & Hove

Subject	*Go-along length*	*Interview length*	*N of photos*	*GPS records*	*Weekly-chart*	*Survey*
Rebecca	00:34:03	01:17:02	17	✓	✓	✓
Stanley	00:41:28	01:05:32	4	✓	✓	✓
Lily	Not recorded	01:00:50	4	✓	✓	✓
Emily	00:34:12	01:04:05	10	✓	✓	✓
Sophie	00:20:43	01:17:36	5	✓	✓	✓
Grace	00:25:43	01:13:35	4	✓	✓	✓
Patrick	00:25:38	01:07:56	4	✓	✓	✓
Lucy	00:25:01	01:16:37	11	✓	✓	✓
Penelope	01:04:43	01:54:32	13	✓	✓	✓
Oliver	00:59:22	00:59:15	8	✓	✓	✓
Hannah	00:51:33	00:49:47	6	✓	✓	✓
Jacob	00:56:11	00:57:27	9	✓	✓	✓
Matthew	00:47:04	01:17:59	14	✓	✓	✓
Isabelle	00:41:21	01:08:16	13	3 days	✓	✓
Isaac	00:22:05	00:55:34	2	2 days	✓	✓
Rose	00:22:22	00:56.19	8	✓	✓	✓
Max	01:06:32	01:05:44	6	✓	✓	✓
Charlie	01:37:20	01:37:20	6	✓	✓	✓
William	01:13:07	01:51:45	16	✓	✓	✓
Harriet	00:34:50	01:06:40	9	✓	✓	✓
Eve	01:22:44	01:12:11	9	✓	✓	✓
Iris	01:07:08	01:46:12	10	✓	✓	✓
George	00:39:00	01:24:40	8	✓	✓	✓
Alex	00:50:00	01:46:16	9	✓	✓	✓
Daniel	00:15:00	01:34:44	6	✓	✓	✓

Data analysis

Analytical approach

The analysis of the qualitative data follows a long tradition of interpretive approaches in the social sciences. Interpretivism is very common in ethnographic studies because of its effort to move beyond the first superficial descriptive layer of analysis to grasp "the meaning particular social actions have for the actors whose actions they are, and to state, as explicitly as we can manage, what the knowledge thus attained demonstrates about the society in which it is found and, beyond that, about social life as such" (adapted by Geertz, 1973, p.27). Interpretivism was the ideal approach for this study given that it was an in-depth research that required close contact with the subjects under investigation and aimed to disclose the meanings of their everyday practices and perceptions of the urban spaces.

This interpretive study draws some methodological procedures from Grounded Theory (GT), i.e. a method of data analysis and generation of theories developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and currently used among qualitative studies. GT was chosen for two main reasons: first, it aims at the construction of theories rather than the mere application of already existing theoretical frameworks; second, hypotheses do not precede data analysis but are instead induced by close analysis of the data collected (Silverman 2011). In line with this approach, early hypotheses were avoided; instead, theoretical conceptualisations were developed through the analysis of the data and such concepts were tested and expanded with the data collected in following stages. Data collection and data analysis were undertaken in a cyclical process that started with data collection, continued with data analysis and then proceeded with the construction of concepts. The cycle started again as the concepts were validated (or not validated) with further collection of data and further analysis. Analytical considerations that emerged during fieldwork were all written in an ethnographic diary in the form of memos about interesting issues and themes that might have led to later construction of theoretical concepts. The diary was also used to write everyday activities, research progress and personal perceptions. Memo-writing is one of the analytical tools that define GT, combined with coding as a technique to facilitate interpretive analysis. Given the large volume of qualitative data gathered for this research, coding was essential not just in assisting the interpretation of the data but also in managing the materials methodically (see next section for details on the coding process). However, in contrast to one of the dictums of GT, extensive

literature review was undertaken before venturing in the field. Instead, GT advises avoiding the review of the relevant literature in the area under study to prevent any preconceptions that might compromise the interpretation of the data (Glaser 1992). It is generally acknowledged that bias is part of any interpretive research, and that regular review of the literature is a necessary requirement for an adequate collection of data.

Analysis of go-alongs and interviews

The 99 interviews (50 in-depth interviews and 49 go-alongs) were analysed in several phases. Data analysis started as a parallel process to data collection and it encouraged the revision of some interview questions as well as the development of new issues to cover during the interviews with subsequent respondents. The interviews were transferred on QSR NVivo 10, i.e. a computer software that assists the organisation and analysis of different sorts of data, especially qualitative although not exclusively. Then, each interview transcript underwent content analysis. This means that every transcript was read thoroughly to identify key-issues that were highlighted by using descriptive codes generated by the researcher as the reading proceeded and new or recurrent themes were identified. Examples of descriptive codes were "public spaces", "routines", "safety", "social networks", "solitude", since some specific segments of the transcripts related to such themes. In addition to descriptive codes, the researcher produced memos on a separate file on NVivo. Memos had a more conceptual nature rather than being purely descriptive and they were generated as a result of initial coding. In other words, memos were useful to sketch ideas and reflect about concepts embedded in the texts as these emerged through the coding process. Rather than using NVivo extensively to automatically explore relationships between the data or to create models, the software was used mostly as an organisational tool to manage and arrange the materials methodically. It was also very useful in retrieving coded texts easily and in connecting different sources (e.g., one person's segment about a photo linked to the photo itself or one person's comment linked to a memo). Among the analytical tools offered by NVivo, coding and memo writing were the most effective techniques in assisting the analysis, accompanied by text search and the possibility to run queries to examine the large volume of data. Other than that, the research did not rely on NVivo to undertake in-depth analysis; instead, a thorough and repeated reading of the transcripts was preferred, together with the re-thinking and re-writing of memos and codes in a dynamic process of discovery and conceptualisation.

Analysis of photographs

Also participants' photos were imported on QSR NVivo together with the interviews. One or more descriptive codes were assigned to each photo purely to manage the large volume of photographs gathered and to facilitate a thematic grouping of the photos according to the public place represented in each one, e.g. "park", "bank", "café". Besides this superficial descriptive classification that assisted a clear organisation of the materials, no additional content analysis of the photos was undertaken because the personal interpretation of the images was considered as misleading. Numerous photos portrayed details of public places such as the façades of buildings, so any interpretation beyond description would have been impossible to attain. In line with other authors, the researcher considered the interpretation of the photo as irrelevant to the study's objectives, as the photos hardly suggested anything about people's everyday life when decontextualised and separated from the subjects who took it (Latham 2003; Johnsen et al. 2008; Radley & Taylor 2003; Radley et al. 2005). The significance of each photo emerged only in dialectic relationship with the author rather than through the researcher's efforts to understand the subject portrayed. The photos were then used in combination with the interview transcripts during the analysis of the latter.

Analysis of survey data

The data gathered through the questionnaires and the weekly charts were transferred on a Microsoft Excel database. The data were then imported on SPSS Statistics to undertake statistical analysis, which is discussed in Chapter 4. Therefore, Chapter 4 draws both from quantitative and qualitative data, which are analysed respectively through statistical analysis and GT. A statistical analysis of the survey data was considered as the appropriate approach to explore the ways in which mobility patterns relate to other variables such as gender, age, education and marital status.

The value of combining different research methods

The complexity and insightfulness of the data gathered for this study would not have been achieved without combining the methods discussed above. In other words, the combined use of such research methods was indeed a strength of this project and provided more data than each method could individually. First of all, it was important to use GPS tracking as part of the research methods because it enabled a particular kind of analysis of participants' mobility that could not have been undertaken with interviews only. More specifically, the visualisation of people's patterns outdoors showed the distances travelled by the respondents, the most and least frequented areas of the city and the density of movements in different public spaces. The GPS data spurred initial hypothesis on older people's reasons to visit certain areas, which were investigated in a subsequent phase during the semi-structured interview. Thus, on one hand the interviews complemented GPS data. Nonetheless, it was a reciprocal contribution given that GPS records worked as a support for the conversations with the subjects. For example, participants did not always remember the totality of the places visited during the recorded week, or they were not necessarily aware of details about their everyday trips, such as the distance travelled during the week and the frequency of visits to different places. By looking at GPS track logs on the computer the respondents were able to gain a more complete picture of their mobility activity. Similar considerations need to be stressed with regard to the photos. As mentioned already, the meaning of each picture taken by the subjects emerged only in relation to the description given by the author during the interview. Most photos showed places of the city with no intrinsic significance when isolated from the author's explanation. Therefore, the interviews represented the essential opportunity to discuss the meanings of the photos. Moreover, the combined use of photos with GPS tracking helped older people recalling the places visited, which could be otherwise forgotten. When this happened, the respondents developed narratives starting from the place shown in the photo and – prompted by the GPS records on the map – they commented also on the surrounding geographical area. Thus, more extensive information about the week of participation to the research were obtained at the interviews thanks to the photos. In addition, many respondents attended the interview with excitement because of the opportunity to see their photos and movements on a map. This encouraged older people to attend the interview and increased the chances to make it an enjoyable experience.

Research ethics

Any academic project that involves the study of human beings requires researchers to design and conduct their work adhering to ethics rules provided by university committees and other institutional boards. One purpose of this is to evaluate the benefits and potential risks for the subjects under study. Another is to control that the researcher will use personal information and data in a morally acceptable way, and to ensure that the data are stored correctly and securely. In this research, each participant was provided with an information sheet and a consent form. The former illustrated the purposes of the research, the methods used and the commitment asked to every subject; the latter served to confirm that the individual had understood what his or her involvement entailed, how personal data would have been protected and the right to withdraw at any time during the process. Participants were also asked whether they agreed to record the go-along and the interview – for which a positive answer was always received – and the guidelines on how to carry the GPS were also adjusted to meet participants' preferences, with the purpose of making the experience as comfortable as possible. In addition, researcher and research participants discussed the subjects' responsibilities of taking part in the data collection and of "becoming researchers". In particular, she underlined the responsibilities related to the use of a digital camera in public places and the need for them to respect other people's privacy in public areas.

Working within strict regulations of institutional ethics can be frustrating for social researchers. Several authors have highlighted the inadequacy of some of the rigid requirements dictated by ethics protocols and the difficulty to apply them universally and indiscriminately to any study (Elwood 2007; Johnsen et al. 2008; Newton et al. 2012). Exceptional and peculiar situations that emerge in specific research contexts may lead researchers to question the value and benefit of some ethical precautions that were planned in advance to ensure a morally correct development of the research. As Elwood (2007) argues, it is indeed necessary to institutionalise researchers' commitment to ethics principles, but the practicalities of that can be very complex and this antithesis is widely recognised within the academic literature. For instance, anonymity is a taken for granted principle of ethical research and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) claims that "the anonymity of respondents must be respected" (Economic and Social Research Council 2012, p.3). In the present research, this condition was met by assuring participants that

pseudonyms would have been used instead of real names and that their identity not would have been identifiable by any of the materials used in the thesis (i.e., GPS track logs, photographs and interviews transcripts). However, this was disappointing to some research subjects who would have appreciated to keep their names in the thesis (as far as interviews excerpts and photographs were concerned) because that would have awarded them public recognition for their contribution to a scientific research. This issue has been raised also by Johnsen et al. (2008), as they claim that such dilemmas about anonymity and authorship are faced often by social researchers who use visual methods and they imply questions around the politics of representation. With regard to this research, participants' desire to have their names on the thesis was discounted to follow the ethics committee's requirement of anonymity of the respondents.

An important aspect of doing research is also reflexivity intended as a process of reflection on the relationship of the researcher with the research subjects and on the research process more broadly. In this regard, considerations about the researcher's positionality as a young, female and foreign researcher emerged in the phase of data collection, with the knowledge that any of these conditions could not be escaped. Concerning the age difference between researcher and participants, the researcher recognises that the interpretation of older people's narratives was filtered by her own age. For this reason, during the whole phases of data collection and analysis the researcher reflected on possible misinterpretation of the subjects' discourses and on the appropriateness of the questions. Older people seemed to enjoy spending some time with a young researcher, often because they did not have many opportunities to be with young people. Participants were surprised and pleased that a young person could be interested in the life of older people and in this sense the age difference turned out to be a resource for the conversations. In return, the informants asked many questions to the researcher about her personal life and interests, such as why she wanted to research later life and why somewhere different from her country of birth. Moreover, the researcher's different nationality played a positive role in enhancing familiarity with older people before they started the seven days-process, as many participants appreciated or had travelled to her country of birth and they asked questions about it. This helped removing from the beginning the formality that may characterise researcher-respondents relationships. Initially it was expected that being a woman might have limited the opportunities to recruit male participants, because of the assumption that older men may tend to visit more gender-

defined places, such as clubs, societies or particular cafés. However, gender did not represent a problem as males were recruited mostly in leisure centres and through friends of friends.

Also the creation of social relationships with the research subjects was necessarily a matter of reflexive thinking. A large number of participants wanted and expected to extend the relationship beyond the boundaries of "researcher-respondent" and beyond the brief period of seven days, longing for a long-lasting friendship in some cases. Managing these expectations proved to be difficult for the researcher, who tried to stay in touch after the seven days-process through brief visits, phone calls and emails especially. However, this attitude raised concerns about how ethical these efforts to please everyone were, given that it was expected that contacts with the subjects would have been interrupted at some point. As other authors have underlined, the frameworks provided by different research ethics institutions do not provide researchers with clear instructions on how to manage the "fluctuating identities" that characterise ethnographic research nor do they advise on how to manage the relationships once the research has come to an end (Newton et al. 2012, p.590).

Reflexivity not only meant reflecting on the relationship with the research subjects but also reflecting on how the everyday life of older people might unfold in the two cities through indirect information rather than through questions asked at interviews. For example, in January the city of Brighton & Hove was covered in snow for a week and the researcher had to reschedule the first of four appointments with a participant. Since the researcher was commuting from London, she called the subject twice during the week of heavy snow for updates on the situation. This person explained that it was snowing so intensely that she only went out very briefly to walk the dog. The researcher had been in that area already to meet some older people at a community centre and noticed the limited number of services and facilities and the poor transportation compared to other parts of the city. This led to reflections on the impact of living in that hillside and quite isolated area in the north of Brighton on individuals' opportunities to be socially active, avoid loneliness and access services. This case also points to ethical considerations on the responsibilities of the research subjects who had to undertake the seven days-process during cold winter months. The researcher recognised the possibility that individuals may have experienced pressure to go out to fulfil an interesting diary during winter's cold days, in which they would have probably stayed home or just gone out very briefly if they did not have to undertake the task. To reduce the risk that such eventuality occurred, the researcher explained the participants that focus of

the research was their ordinary everyday life with no alteration caused by the study. In so doing, they were encouraged to stay home if they did not feel comfortable in going outdoors because even these circumstances would have provided useful information for the research. Another example of reflexivity comes from the experiences of undertaking go-along with some frail participants, as several times when a participant approached the counter of a shop in company of the researcher, the staff ignored the older person and talked to the researcher instead. These moments were prompts for reflection on ageist attitudes that older people may experience while undertaking their day-to-day activities in public places, and they were also discussed afterwards with the research subjects.

Chapter 4 – Navigating the urban area on an ordinary week

This chapter presents some exploratory analysis of the quantitative data. Participants were asked about their daily activities, including the places they visited, the reasons for going out, and the modes of transport they used. The chapter complements answers to closed questions with information obtained during face-to-face interviews and with the examination of GPS track logs. Three photos taken by the subjects are included too as a visual support to their comments. A panel dataset has been created on the basis of the information collected; the panel is formed of seven observations for each individual, corresponding to the seven days in which each person answered the closed form questions about his or her activities. The resulting dataset includes 350 observations associated with 50 individuals. The size of the sample restricts the scope for the use of inferential statistics to identify causal relationships between variables. Nevertheless, by exploring the quantitative data it was possible to identify patterns that can inform the analysis of the qualitative material collected during interviews and walk-alongs. This chapter addresses the research question on the significance of age in determining people's social interactions and mobility patterns.

Frequency of weekly outings

Individuals were asked to detail the frequency of their weekly outings. This information provides an overall picture of the average time spent outdoors by the subjects and helps defining better the characteristics of the research sample.[5] For instance, it is important to understand whether the sample can be clearly split along demographic or geographical lines in relation to individuals' frequency of total outings. For the purpose of this research, outings

5. Precise information on the exact number of hours spent outdoors and the time spent in different sorts of places cannot be provided as the weekly charts only record whether a person has gone out or not and for what reason.

are defined as any sort of journey outdoors, even short trips to local stores.[6] The data show that the vast majority of participants (44 out of 50 people) went out every day during the week. This is irrespective of age, gender, marital status and household composition. In addition, there is no clear evidence that some days of the week are preferred to others for going out. Except for a few cases, informants claimed that the week during which they undertook the survey represented an ordinary one and all ensured that they did not change routines and activities because of the research. Details of the participants who did not go out every day over the week are listed in Table 6. During the interviews, the subjects who recorded only four outings claimed that during an ordinary week they might go out more than the frequency reported in the specific week of survey, in which they spent more time indoors due to circumstances related to health (i.e., Alice and Robert) and weather (i.e., Emily).

Table 6 – Details of participants with less than seven outings per week

Subjects	Age	City	N of outings
Jack	69	Hackney	6
Benjamin	65	Hackney	6
Alice	71	Hackney	4
Robert	72	Hackney	4
Emily	68	Brighton	4
Jacob	90	Hove	6

The sample is composed of individuals who are reasonably healthy (although a few report having some physical impairment), enjoy going out for a variety of reasons, and tend to spend a regular amount of their time away from their domestic space. This does not necessarily imply that participants do not enjoy the time spent at home as well. In this regard, the interviews reveal that several subjects normally may dedicate one day per week mainly to indoor activities within the home environment, such as housework or hobbies. Moreover, the fact that people tend to go out every day during the week does not imply that the amount of time spent outdoors exceeds the time spent at home during a typical day, as many subjects go out a few times a day only for short trips, e.g. to buy the paper at the local newsagent or for a little walk.

6. Local stores are defined in this study as small shops such as off-license and grocery stores within a 10-15 minute walk from the participant's residence. In line with other research (Du Toit et al. 2007), the distance reflects informants' interpretation of "local" as it emerged during the interviews.

Places visited during the week

This section explores in more detail the kinds of public places visited by the research subjects during the week of survey. The analysis begins by pooling individuals from Hackney and Brighton & Hove to provide an overall representation of the sample. Table 7 reports the total frequencies, defined as a "participant – day of the week" couple, that are associated with each typology of place. The same individuals may visit multiple places during the same outing. In the diary-charts that were part of the survey, participants could name further places to the list provided if they needed. This means that the final list of places shown in Table 7 was not set up by the researcher in its entirety but it reflects participants' experiences. In the table, places are ranked from the most to the least visited. Indeed, local shops were the most frequent destination of outings as 165 cells are associated with this place. Green areas (i.e., parks and community allotments), leisure centres and cafés were also highly frequented by the participants. Nevertheless, because of the nature of these four types of place, it can be assumed that there might be a difference in the amount of time spent in each one. In other words, local shops are normally places of transit where people do not spend a significant amount of their time, whereas in recreational settings people normally linger longer.

While the survey considers only one week of each participant's life, interviews allow for more extensive investigations of mobility patterns. Among the 22 informants who explicitly answered the question "What are the main reasons for you to go outdoors?" the vast majority provided the following answers: pleasure, getting some exercise by walking, hobbies (especially pilates, yoga and art classes), shopping and walking the dog. These answers disclose the importance assigned by the research subjects to different forms of gentle physical exercise and to other sources of enjoyment (such as meeting friends or relatives in a café) that can be experienced outdoors. This finding is also supported by the quantitative data as it can be seen that the four most frequented places are local shops, parks and allotments, leisure centres and cafés, places that certainly encourage pleasure and/or exercise. Indeed, good health is a prerequisite necessary to the undertaking of such activities, as it affords older people independence and the possibility to be active and engaged in a variety of things (Shephard 1997). Participants assign a great value to regular physical exercise because it is expected to sustain and prolong an independent lifestyle, and this is demonstrated by the high frequency to leisure centres and attendance to other wellbeing-related classes.

Table 7 – Total number of visits to a variety of public places (Hackney + Brighton & Hove)

Places visited	Frequency
Local shop	165
Park/Allotment	80
Leisure Centre	65
Café	63
Shopping centre	45
Community Centre	26
Professionals	26
Restaurant	25
Post Office	25
Bank	24
Cinema/Theatre	22
Library	21
Market	20
Pub	20
Church/Mosque/Temple	18
Train Station	14
Fast Food	11
Museum	9
Other	3
Hair Dresser/Barber	1

Given their prominence, the frequency of outings directed to the four most frequented places among the participants needs to be investigated in more detail. In particular, it is worth looking at whether there are people who went to those places several times a week whilst others who did not go at all. Table 8 shows that only two out of 50 subjects did not go to local shops, while the number increases with regard to the other places. Therefore, it can be argued that a visit to the local shop is something commonly undertaken among the sample of older people, although personal frequencies vary from a maximum of seven days a week to a minimum of one day (and this does not account for possible multiple visits during a same day). Not only the presence of stores in the local area influences older people's frequency of

outings, but it contributes also to generate a positive perception of the area among the residents. For example, during walk-alongs several informants complained about the sharp reduction in the number of local stores that has taken place over the last few years in some areas of Hackney. The absence of shops can greatly transform the appearance and vitality of an area in negative ways, e.g. by emptying the streets, cutting economic activity, generating a sense of abandonment and insecurity among the residents. Conversely, where new local shops have opened both in Hackney and Brighton & Hove, the older population has welcomed them with enthusiasm, as they imply easier accessibility of facilities and availability of products, more economic activity and jobs, enjoyable and safe atmosphere when they venture out of their homes (see also Day 2008; Gilroy 2008; Mehta 2007). Given these considerations, it is argued that policymakers and urban planners might want to encourage local economies by supporting local shops and promoting their fair distribution throughout the fabric of the city, as that would assist the creation of inclusive cities for older people.

With regard to older people who visited parks and allotments, the majority of them went once a week; a smaller number of people went two or three times, and only a few people went four times or more. Informants in both case study locations feel fortunate about living in very green – yet urban – environments, and a visit to a natural open space is very important because of the temporary change of scenery and the perceived health and psychological benefits that it provides. About leisure centres, most subjects visited them once during the course of seven days; the number of participants then decreases when we consider visits between two and four times a week, and sharply reduces if we look at the number of people who went six or seven times. Older people are encouraged to undertake health activities by practitioners, local government and various organisations that work for the over 60s. Indeed, a wide range of opportunities are available to those who feel confident in joining leisure and community centres and sport clubs, which can work also as expedients to make new acquaintances. Lastly, going to cafés is another activity that many participants have in common. The vast majority visited a café once a week, only a few participants two and three times, and a smaller but yet noticeable number of participants went five times during the week. Despite the vast number and variety of cafés available in the two cities, the research subjects generally do not seem to value the visit to a café other than as a treat to be enjoyed occasionally with friends or relatives. This is likely to stem from two related reasons. One reason concerns the cost of the services which are usually too expensive according to participants' opinion, and the second – especially for those aged 70 and over – may reflect a

generational attitude of not entirely conceiving the café culture as a day-to-day habit, given that many of the older participants claimed that they used not to go to cafés during their youth and adulthood.

Table 8 – Number of visits to the top four places in relation to the number of participants who visited them

	Number of research subjects who went to:			
Frequency of visits over 7 days	**Local shops**	**Parks or allotments**	**Leisure centres**	**Cafés**
0	2	19	20	20
1	7	13	16	15
2	11	5	4	6
3	8	5	4	5
4	11	3	4	0
5	3	2	0	3
6	3	1	1	1
7	5	2	1	0
Total	50	50	50	50

Having looked in more detail at the places visited among the totality of participants, it is now worth comparing Hackney and Brighton & Hove to investigate the influence of different urban environments on individual choice. First of all, it is interesting to consider differences and affinities in terms of attendance to leisure centres and parks because these may reflect variations across the two areas in older people's attitudes towards policy discourses on active ageing. The concept of *active ageing* embraces different forms of positive contributions by older people to enhance their own wellbeing and possibly the wellbeing of others, e.g. hobbies, interests, volunteering, working and independent undertaking of everyday tasks (Michael et al. 2012; Walker 2002), and it has been defined as:

> "the desire and ability of older people to integrate physical activity into daily routines, such as walking for transportation, exercise, or pleasure. Active aging may also include engagement in economic or socially productive activities, such as playing in the park with grandchildren and working in the home or yard." (Michael et al. 2006, p.734)

The emphasis on active ageing in policy discourses may influence older people's habits with regard to taking walks in parks, working at an allotment, undertaking a variety of sport

and/or recreational classes in leisure centres.[7] By looking at the two environments separately (Table 9) it can be observed that a high number of visits, which are rather evenly distributed between the two locations, were made to leisure centres and to parks or allotments (regarding the seafront in Brighton & Hove as an equivalent to walks in parks).

Table 9 – Frequency of visits to specific places in the two cities. "Max" and "Min" refer to the maximum and minimum number of visits to a place made by one person over the week; "Sum" is the sum of all visits made by all participants

Places visited	Hackney			Brighton & Hove		
	Min	Max	Sum	Min	Max	Sum
Local shops	0	7	**83**	0	7	**82**
Shopping centre	0	5	**26**	0	4	**19**
Market	0	4	**17**	0	2	**3**
Café	0	5	**31**	0	6	**32**
Restaurant	0	1	**9**	0	4	**16**
Fast food	0	7	**10**	0	1	**1**
Church / Mosque / Temple	0	4	**11**	0	2	**7**
Cinema / Theatre	0	2	**10**	0	3	**12**
Museum	0	2	**7**	0	1	**2**
Library	0	2	**14**	0	3	**7**
Community centre	0	3	**11**	0	4	**15**
Park / Allotment	0	7	**43**	0	5	**37**
Leisure centre / Hobbies	0	7	**43**	0	4	**22**
Hairdresser / Barber	0	1	**1**	0	0	**0**
Bank / Building society	0	2	**8**	0	3	**16**
Post office	0	2	**8**	0	6	**17**
Professionals	0	2	**10**	0	3	**16**
Train station	0	3	**8**	0	3	**6**
Pub	0	2	**7**	0	4	**13**
Seafront	0	0	**0**	0	6	**9**

7. When a person ticked the box "leisure centre" in the survey, he or she may not necessarily refer to workout classes but also to recreational activities specifically aimed at the over 60s often organised in leisure centres (e.g., art classes), or he or she may refer to sport activities that take place outdoors (e.g., canoeing).

In both locations, among those participants who did not visit leisure centres there are some who normally go but were unable to attend classes during the week in which they recorded their weekly activities. Although the total frequency of visits is fairly even in the two areas, the result changes when we look at the total visits by individuals during the course of the week. Table 10 shows that the number of visits in Hackney is double that of Brighton & Hove. Still with regard to leisure centres, five participants in Hackney went between four and seven times during the week, whereas in Brighton & Hove only one went four times, which is the maximum number of weekly visits to leisure centres in that city (Table 10). In part, the difference is a consequence of the recruiting process given that potential candidates were first approached at leisure centres and asked whether they wanted to take part. While 15 people in Hackney were finally recruited at a leisure/community centre that organises a large number of physical activities for the over 50s, only two persons were recruited at a similar community centre in Hove. The recruiting process has inevitably influenced the different outcome, but it does not imply that other participants in both localities are not involved in sport and leisure activities or that the opportunities are scarce in Brighton & Hove. In fact, many other subjects in both localities reported to pursue personal interests and undertake different activities. In this regard, it is important to stress that on a national level the percentage of older people engaged in physical and non-physical activities is significant. Figures from research conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (Jenkins et al. 2010) on a sample of 1,979 people between 60 and 84 years old show that 49% of people between 60 and 69 years old are involved in non-physical leisure activities, and 48% undertake sport regularly. Indeed, the percentages decrease with age, however the results aim to emphasise the significant role of leisure activities in older people's lives. Hence, it can be argued that such significance is somehow reflected in this sample of 50 older people.

Table 10 – Frequency of visits to leisure centres by number of subjects

Frequency of visits to leisure centres per week	Number of subjects in HA	Number of subjects in B&H
1	10	6
2	1	3
3	2	2
4	3	1
5	0	0
6	1	0
7	1	0

Apart from parks, allotments and leisure centres, people's visits to shopping centres, markets, fast food, museums and libraries are noticeably higher in Hackney (Table 9), where the offer is wider and more differentiated. For example, the ease with which older people can reach other areas of London encourages visits to museums in other boroughs. The same occurs with regard to markets and libraries, as people may visit different ones both in and out of the borough. Museums, libraries and markets are public places that can be visited free, which certainly is an incentive. Instead, Brighton & Hove has a minor number of museums and libraries available and the subjects in Hove claimed to frequent only one market in a recently redesigned street. In Brighton & Hove, older people recorded more frequent visits to restaurants, pubs, and a variety of local services, i.e. banks, post offices and professionals. Lastly, data show that subjects in both cities went to local shops, cafés, community centres, cinemas and theatres a similar amount of times, hence showing no particular differences in terms of influence played by the two urban settings on attendance to socio-cultural places.

The research shows that older people went out for mundane, everyday necessities that include shopping for food and leisure activities. Therefore, it can be argued that being able to maintain such lifestyle is important to the participants because it enables them to lead a "normal" day-to-day life that prevents them from becoming detached from the rest of society. The opportunity to live a later life that includes outings with a variety of everyday purposes is greatly influenced by their health and by the closely related opportunity to be independent from other people's assistance. Given the importance attributed by the research subjects to physical activity and to being fit, it may be argued that the policy emphasis on active aging is effectively translated into practice for what concerns the preservation of good health. Furthermore, the qualitative data highlight that going out is a deliberate and self-determined decision that stems from the desire to be independent and engaged in different activities and daily expeditions to avoid detachment from the outside world. Thus, people's wish to lead a normal and independent life combined with popular discourses around active ageing are a great stimulus for the maintenance of an healthy lifestyle. Rather than transforming older people's lifestyles, the active ageing rhetoric is more likely to support them. Arguably, it would not be as equally effective without the individual's self-awareness and determination.

The following pages investigate further how mobility patterns are associated with individual characteristics such as gender and marital status, to understand whether these may influence the probability of going to one place rather than another or to undertake some activities but

not others. To do so, a random-effect Probit model has been employed. A Probit model investigates the effect of a series of factors (independent variables) on the probability of occurrence of a given event. On the left-hand side of the Probit regression the event is represented by a dummy variable that assumes value 1 if this event occurs and value 0 if it does not occur. This variable changes values over the seven observations relative to the seven days for each subject. For example, if we consider the dummy for "going to a local shop", this variable assumes value 1 for each day of the week in which a given individual goes to a local shop and value 0 when the same person does not go to such a place. On the right-hand side of the regression there are series of variables representing subjects' demographic characteristics such as age, sex and marital status.

The random effect model allows for some unobserved characteristics (i.e., the random effect) to vary across individuals and to affect the probability of the event. The assumption underpinning the model is that this characteristic is "random" in the sense that it is uncorrelated with the covariates included on the right-hand side of the model. Some independent variables are themselves dummy variables in the sense that they assume only value 1 and 0 (e.g., sex is coded 1 if the subject is female and 0 if male), others are ordered categorically and they assume a range of discrete values (precisely, these variables are "day of week", "education", "marital status", "age groups", "years spent in the local area" and "ethnicity"). For these variables, one dummy for each possible category has been created. For example, there are three dummies that correspond to the three possible values assumed by the categorical variable "marital status": the first assumes value 1 when the participant is married or in civil partnership (i.e., marital status 1) and value 0 otherwise, the second assumes value 1 when she is divorced or separated (i.e., marital status 2) and value 0 otherwise, and the third value 1 when she is divorced (i.e., marital status 3) and value 0 otherwise. Table 11 lists all the independent variables used in the model with their respective values.

The remaining part of the section reports the output of univariate random-effect Probit regressions, where the dependent variable is indicated in the heading of each table and refers either to places visited or to reasons to go outdoors. The independent variables adopted for these regressions relate to individuals' characteristics, i.e. "gender", "age group", "marital status", "years spent in the local area", "education", "do you live by yourself?" and "do you have children or relatives?" (see Table 11). These variables have been considered because of

their potential impact on people's attendance to places. However, three independent variables listed in the table have not been mentioned here, i.e. "town", "day of the week" and "ethnicity". The latter is not taken into consideration because of the statistically insignificant variety of ethnic backgrounds in the research sample, whereas the former two are not examined here because the analysis concentrates specifically on personal factors that may affect individuals' visits to particular places (besides, a comparison between the two towns has been addressed already, cf. p.84). For each possible demographic characteristic, its influence on individuals' probabilities to undertake each different outdoor activity has been considered. In this section, the discussion of the model's outcomes is confined to the most noticeable results.

Table 11 – Table of reference outlining all the independent variables with the respective values used to run Probit regressions

Independent variables	Values
Town	0= Hackney, 1= Brighton & Hove
Day of week	1= Monday, 2= Tuesday, 3= Wednesday, 4= Thursday, 5= Friday, 6= Saturday, 7= Sunday
Gender	0= male, 1= female
Education	0= no schooling 1= attended primary school, left at age 11 or under 2= attended primary and secondary school and left at age 14-16 3= stayed at school for the first sixth form and left at age 18 4= day release course leading to vocational qualification 5= attended college full time to study for a vocational qualification 6= studied for and obtained a bachelor degree 7= studied for and obtained a Master or PhD 8= other
Marital status	0= single 1= married/civil partnership 2= divorced/separated 3= widowed
Age groups	1= 60 to 64 2= 65 to 69 3= 70 to 74 4= 75 to 79 5= 80 to 90
Years spent in the local area	1: <=15 2: >15 and <=30 3: >30 and <=58 4: >=59
Do you live by yourself?	0= no, 1= yes
Do you have children/relatives?	0= no children/relatives, 1= have children/relatives
Ethnicity	0= Welsh, 1= English, 2= Scottish, 3= Irish, 4= other White, 5= Indian, 6= Pakistani, 7= Bangladeshi, 8= Chinese, 9= other Asian, 10= Caribbean, 11= African, 12= Arabian, 13= other Black, 14= mixed White & Black Caribbean, 15= mixed White & Black African, 16= mixed White & Asian, 17= mixed other

This chapter has already identified that no meaningful relationship between gender and the probability of undertaking daily outings emerged from the survey, leading to the conclusion that men and women have the same probability of going out in each given day of the week. The first regression in Table 12 considers the influence of gender on outings with shopping purposes, which may be relevant given that local shops are the most frequented places amongst the research subjects. However, again there is no significant effect of gender on the dependent variable, meaning that gender does not appear to affect individuals' tendency to go out for shopping. Moreover, gender is not found to affect the probability of going to any other possible destination except for theatres and cinemas, which women appear to frequent more often than men (Table 13). Hence, it can be argued that gender does not seem to influence the frequency of weekly outings or the sort of places visited. Therefore, it may be hypothesised that gender becomes a less relevant factor in determining older people's experiences outdoors and preferences of places visited if compared to earlier stages of life.

Table 12 – Probit regression showing no significance on the probability of going shopping in relation to gender

Going out for shopping	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Females	-.066	.077	-0.86	0.389
cons	.521	.053	9.70	0.000

Table 13 – Probit regression showing how the probability of going to theatres and cinemas changes in relation to gender

Going to theatres and cinemas	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Females	.058	.024	2.36	0.018
cons	.031	.012	2.50	0.012

There are instead some differences when the age groups and the probability of going out for shopping are considered. The results reported in Table 14 show statistically significant differences between age groups on the probability of undertaking this activity. The results show that subjects in the youngest age group (i.e., group 1, 60 to 64 years old) go out for shopping more than the other age groups, while the four participants aged between 75 and 79 appear to go out less than any other age group. Further results show no apparent relationship between age and attendance to markets, cafés, restaurants, local shops, pubs, libraries, cinemas and theatres. Another significant correlation emerges with regard to the variable

"marital status" and the probability of going for shopping (Table 14). The result shows that people who are married and those who are with a partner tend to go shopping less than singles, while those who are divorced or separated and those who are widowed do not seem to have either more or less probability of going out for shopping compared to singles. Therefore, it can be concluded that participants who go out less for shopping are those who are married or in civil partnership, possibly because they can share the task with their partners. No additional significant relationships are found by the quantitative analysis, meaning that whether participants are single, married, divorced or widowed does not affect the kind of places they go to or the reasons for going out and about.

Table 14 – Probit regression showing how the probability of going shopping changes among age groups and according to marital status

Going out for shopping	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
65 to 69	-.819	.289	-2.83	0.005
70 to 74	-.900	.298	-3.02	0.003
75 to 79	-1.313	.441	-2.98	0.003
80 to 90	-.980	.433	-2.26	0.024
cons	.8321773	.2868874	2.90	0.004
Married/Civil partnership	-.225	.097	-2.30	0.021
Divorced/Separated	-.192	.130	-1.48	0.138
Widowed	-.244	.200	-1.22	0.222
cons	.673	.086	7.79	0.000

Possible correlations between the number of years spent in the local area and the places visited have also been considered. Those who have been living in the same area between 30 and 58 years (i.e., group 3) are indeed the majority of the research subjects and they amount to 21. Probit regressions show that people falling within this category tend to go more frequently to local shops than people who have been living in the area for shorter periods of time (Table 15). However, those who have been living longer than 58 years in the area do not present significant differences with those living there for shorter periods. Therefore, clear-cut statistical relationship between the attendance to local shop and years spent in the area cannot be argued. With regard to the probability of going to parks, Table 15 shows that group 3 is more likely to frequent them than group 1, although no significance emerges for group 2

(i.e., >15 and <=30) and 4 (i.e., >=60). Once again, causality cannot be clearly assumed between the number of years spent in the area and the probability of going to parks. Concerning the probability of going to pubs, results in Table 15 demonstrate that those who have been living in the same area for 58 years or longer tend to go to pubs more often than those who have been living for only 15 years or less (i.e., group 1). Even those who have been staying in the same area between 16 and 30 years are more likely to frequent pubs compared to group 1. A positive relationship between the number of years spent in the area and the probability of going to pubs can be hypothesised. This could be interpreted as an increased familiarity with the area that may lead to the frequentation of sociable places in the local community, such as family pubs.

Table 15 – Probit regression showing how the probability of going to local shops, parks or allotments, pubs changes in relation to the number of years spent in the local area

Going to local shops	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
>15 and <=30	.141	.085	1.65	0.100
>30 and <=58	.167	.082	2.02	0.043
>=59	.061	.100	0.61	0.539
cons	.342	.051	6.61	0.000
Going to parks or allotments	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
>15 and <=30	.112	.063	1.78	0.075
>30 and <=58	.172	.072	2.38	0.017
>=59	.247	.147	1.68	0.092
Cons	.085	.031	2.70	0.007
Going to pubs	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
>15 and <=30	.047	.022	2.09	0.037
>30 and <=58	.061	.033	1.84	0.065
>=59	.119	.053	2.24	0.025
cons	9.38e-17	.	.	.

Turning attention to differences relating to education, the results of the Probit regression in Table 16 show that those who achieved the highest levels of schooling ("education 7", i.e. studied for and obtained a Master or PhD, 9 subjects) went to museums and art galleries more than those who attended primary and secondary school and left at the age of 14-16 ("education 2", 12 subjects).[8] However, this result cannot be extended to include all cultural activities, as no significance emerged with regard to theatres and cinemas. Another significant correlation is found with regard to the probability of going to pubs, as those who attended college full time ("education 5", 6 subjects) or obtained a bachelor degree ("education 6", 11 subjects) are less likely to go to pubs than those who belong to the category "education 2" (Table 16). This result adds further information to the interpretation of the positive correlation between the number of years spent in the area and the frequency of visits to pubs (Table 15). In other words, the probability of going to pubs may be class-related. Arguably, the working class is less likely to move compared to upper classes and is generally characterised by lower education qualifications. Among those who visited a pub during the week of data collection, four people belong to well-educated middle class while seven people to working class with low degrees of education. Three out of five people who have lived in the same area for more than 58 years went to pub and they belong to the working class. In addition, among these three subjects, two men went repeatedly during the week, more than any other person in the sample. Therefore, a positive correlation between visits to pubs and the two independent variables may be inferred. However, the size of the sample does not offer sufficient variation to conduct a multivariate analysis of the determinants of pub frequentation. A last significant relationship emerges when the probability of going to community centres is considered. These are frequented mostly by older people who studied to obtain a bachelor degree in relation to the category of reference, i.e. "education 2" (Table 16). These results suggest that the level of schooling can influence to a certain extent some of the activities and places visited by older people.

With regard to household composition, the research finds that people who live by themselves go to restaurants more than those who live with partners, relatives and lodgers (Table 17). It could be hypothesised that living alone might lead to more frequent visits to stores and other services, as well as restaurants, cafés, community centres and other recreational locales

8. All research subjects have some degree of schooling, therefore the category "education 1" (i.e., "no schooling") is not considered in the regression analysis.

because of a possibly higher necessity to satisfy material and psychological needs. In other words, going for instance to the local store, the bank or the community centre could be a way for some older people to socially interact with acquaintances besides accomplishing material tasks. However, no further correlations emerge when other dependent variables are considered, meaning that living alone does not seem to influence to a large degree the outdoor activities and places visited. Hence, based on the quantitative data it is not possible to infer that older people who live on their own visit socio-recreational places more than those who live with other people, as this is observed only in relation to restaurants.

Table 16 – Probit regression showing how the probability of going to galleries and museums, pubs and community centres changes in relation to the level of education

Going to galleries and museums	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Stayed at school for the first sixth form and left at age 18	1.34e-16	4.64e-10	0.00	1.000
Attended college full time to study for a vocational qualification	.047	.027	1.70	0.089
Studied for and obtained a Bachelor degree	.012	.012	1.03	0.303
Studied for and obtained a Master or PhD	.047	.022	2.08	0.037
Other	.061	.040	1.53	0.126
cons	-1.34e-16	4.64e-10	-0.00	1.000
Going to pubs	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Stayed at school for the first sixth form and left at age 18	-.085	.077	-1.11	0.266
Attended college full time to study for a vocational qualification	-.142	.056	-2.51	0.012
Studied for and obtained a Bachelor degree	-.116	.059	-1.97	0.049
Studied for and obtained a Master or PhD	-.111	.064	-1.72	0.085
Other	-.102	.061	-1.65	0.100
cons	.142	.056	2.51	0.012
Going to community centre	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Stayed at school for the first sixth form and left at age 18	.057	.031	1.79	0.073
Attended college full time to study for a vocational qualification	.047	.027	1.70	0.089
Studied for and obtained a Bachelor degree	.194	.056	3.42	0.001
Studied for and obtained a Master or PhD	.015	.015	1.04	0.297
Other	.122	.045	2.68	0.007
cons	-7.57e-17	.	.	.

Table 17 – Probit regression showing how the probability of going to restaurants changes in relation to whether a person lives by herself or with others

Going to restaurants	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Z	P>|z|
Living by themselves	.052	.027	1.89	0.058
cons	.054	.019	2.87	0.004

Interestingly, regressions show that there is a significant relationship between places visited and whether a person has children and/or other relatives who may live in the same city. However, it should be stressed that only four people among the research subjects do not have children or relatives at all. Despite the small number of participants without any relatives, regressions' results show significance for a variety of dependent variables. Specifically, the results in Table 18 highlight that having children or relatives greatly reduces the probability to go out for shopping, whilst it increases the probability to visit parks or allotments, to walk the dog and to go to pubs. It may be supposed that the number of shopping outings decreases because of the possibility of having their shopping done by relatives, although no statistically significant relationships are found when correlations between the probability to go shopping and the household composition are considered. A further possibility is that older people may prefer spending their time with relatives having walks in the park or enjoying a meal in a pub (family pubs are the most popular ones among the subjects) more than shopping, the latter being often regarded as a chore rather than as a sociable occasion. Therefore, on one hand the family – children and grandchildren in particular – plays a significant role in enhancing older people's chances to venture outside the house either because older people may go to visit them or because children may persuade them to go out. However, on the other hand the possibility to rely on relatives for grocery shopping can also reduce older people's weekly mobility by limiting their need to go out for everyday necessities. This consideration supports the *convoy model of social relations* (see Chapter 2) because it highlights the supportive role of family and friends that guarantees a successful old age. Nevertheless, it emphasises also the detrimental role that relatives and friends may play in influencing older people's behaviours in negative ways, in line with the critique developed by Wahl et al.'s (2007).

Table 18 - Probit regression showing how the probability of going for shopping, going to parks or allotments, going out to walk the dog and going to pubs changes in relation to the whether a person has children or relatives

Going for shopping	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Having children/relatives	-.364	.071	-5.09	0.000
cons	.821	.059	0.000	.704
Going to parks or allotments	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Having children/relatives	.248	.041	6.05	0.000
cons	-6.13e-16	.	.	.
Walk the dog	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Having children/relatives	.074	.035	2.08	0.037
cons	-1.03e-16	.	.	.
Going to pubs	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Having children/relatives	.062	.019	3.24	0.001
cons	0	(omitted)	.	.

Geographical worlds of older people

As Phillipson and Scharf (2005) claim, a pessimistic view of the relationship between older people and urban areas among environmental gerontologists has led to the general conviction that urban settlements are likely to be unsupportive and hostile to older people's needs. In their discussion, they explain that such conception is based on a range factors, including the limitations of urban planning, urban decay and degradation, violence and fear to access particular neighbourhoods. In addition, Risser et al. (2010) noticed that urban barriers to older people's mobility are also caused by traffic and ruthlessness of other users that make them feel insecure and disrespected. Other research claims also that older people in general tend to be less mobile than younger people and therefore to decrease the number of daily journeys (Metz 2000). Notwithstanding these findings, there is a risk in generalising the unfriendliness of the urban environment on the basis of age, disregarding a variety of relevant factors such as personal interests, attitudes to life and economic resources. Indeed, the previous section has shown that participants are very mobile on a daily basis. They may even spend more time outdoors and undertake more journeys than younger adults or young people given the combination of free time available and reasonably good health conditions.

The GPS track logs of the 50 participants recorded over seven days provide a first insight into older people's mobility patterns (Figures 4 to 7). In the figures, the grey lines reconstruct people's movements while the yellow circles mark places where photos are taken.[9] It may be true that personal dependence on the surrounding environment and neighbourhood often increases as people age, nevertheless the data gathered in both locations clearly show that older people's worlds do not shrink to the immediate neighbourhood, although the different area sizes of Hackney and Brighton & Hove should be considered when comparing the two pictures. Most of the movements occur within the city and they cover the area extensively. However, it can be observed that some tracks extend beyond the perimeter of the areas under investigation. This finding is in line with Wiles et al.'s (2009) study, which stresses that a considerable number of older people in the city of Auckland in New Zealand navigate beyond their neighbourhoods and that older people also travel internationally. In so doing, it challenges the prominent image of a geographical space that shrinks progressively with age.

9. The figures do not represent the exact totality of journeys because not all movements have been recorded accurately by the subjects, so we might expect an even a busier picture of mobility patterns. The yellow circles with a question mark identify photos that are missing an exact geographic position.

Figure 4 – Brighton & Hove, mobility activity 25 participants, 7 days each

Figure 5 – Brighton & Hove, mobility activity 25 subjects, 7 days each, zoom in

(Source: research data visualised on Google)

Figure 6 – Hackney, mobility activity 25 subjects, 7 days each

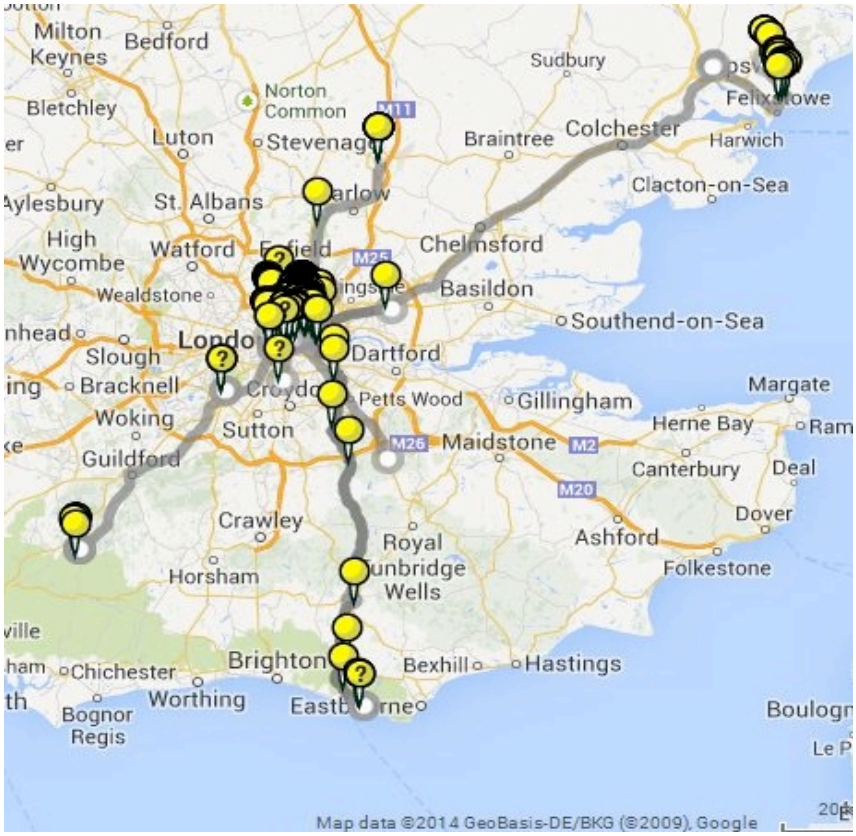
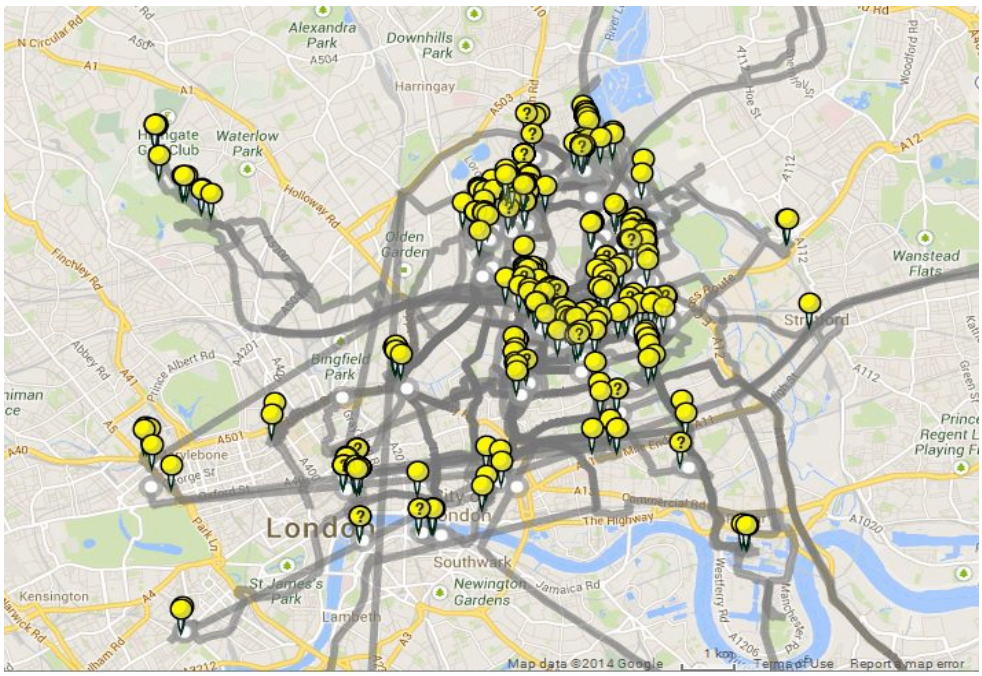


Figure 7 – Hackney, mobility activity 25 subjects, 7 days each, zoom in



(Source: research data visualised on Google)

According to accounts provided by the Hackney informants, the prevailing localised character of movements relates to the adequate supply of services and activities that makes travelling to nearby towns or other boroughs unnecessary. Related to this, it must be stressed that some people develop a particularly strong attachment to the area, and the consideration of the borough as one of the best places in London promotes the localised fulfilment of everyday needs. The following excerpts are taken from two Hackney residents and they reflect the emotional attachment that influences people's use and perception of places (i.e., Zoe) and of why people may not feel the desire to visit other boroughs (i.e., Benjamin):

> *Zoe*: As I get older I tend to stay in Hackney more and all my needs are met in Hackney because it's got everything I need, I don't need anything and I love it… I used to go places like Hampsted Heath but none of it matches Hackney, none of it matches London Fields or matches the areas that I go to. I don't *love* those places, and you want to stay where you love. I love my area, I go to a new area and I don't have the same feeling for it, I don't feel anything for Hampsted Heath or Richmond Park or Hyde Park, I'm not interested in those places, they haven't got anything for me. (…) Because I know this area (Hackney) so well I have created in my head a very green lush map of the places. I could be living in a little village, in my perception, in my routes and where I go. (60, Hackney)

> *Benjamin*: I do rarely go to London. I think of London as being like a collection of villages. I think I link it to the joy of familiarity I suppose, and the things you are familiar with become your village. So I am not familiar with London, with central London, I go to museums, we spend time in the National Theatre, but ehm… we go probably once every two months, something like that. Why I don't go so often… well, there is nothing putting me off, the question is more about what is encouraging me to go. What would I go there for, it takes an hour to go there by bus… but I don't know, there is just enough to do around here. Ehm…and my son works in a theatre in Dalston, so we go there quite a lot, and then once every three months we go to watch a movie down the Rio (a cinema in Hackney). I don't think we would ever dream of going to the cinema in central London, the only one I would go would be the National Film Theatre where they show old movies, I

> became a member of that theatre for one year but I went down there once, it wasn't worth it in the end. (65, Hackney)

These excerpts highlight the relevance of people's biographies in forging a sense of place and attachment to the area. Knowing the area "so well" does not necessarily mean that older people unconditionally feel confident or safe in going out and about. Rather, it highlights individuals' familiarity both with the positive and negative aspects of the local surroundings (Peace et al. 2006), which supports their sense of control over the environment. The excerpts suggest that Hackney's older residents may not need to travel outside the borough because their needs are satisfied within the area and this relates to the perception of Hackney as one amongst other self-contained "villages" of the city of London. Such interpretation of the city is promoted by the Greater London Authority, which in a report on the future of city's suburbs highlights exactly London's "unique character as a city made up of a series of villages" (Rudlin et al. 2002, p.7) and expands the statement by claiming that:

> "the sense of London as a city of villages still holds true. This is not always so evident in central areas but is fundamental to the character and personality of the suburbs – it remains what makes London a unique world city." (Rudlin et al. 2002, p.47)

It can be argued that the necessity to visit other boroughs decreases with age because all London boroughs can satisfy more than just basic needs, as they usually offer a range of amenities including cinemas, theatres, art galleries, parks and restaurants. Therefore, older residents spend less time beyond the borough than younger people or younger adults who may need to commute to work or to visit specific places for leisure. In so doing, older people develop an exceptionally strong familiarity with and attachment to Hackney. Moreover, compared to younger individuals they are likely to have spent a higher number of years in the borough, which may contribute to develop a more geographically-confined sense of belonging. The self-sufficiency of every borough in terms of offer of services and each borough's diversity and distinctive character are also important factors that encourage people's perception of the city as an agglomeration of villages. It can be expected that such diversity influences the conception of London as a conglomeration of villages also among London residents of all ages, who may support this image regardless of their possibly more varied mobility out of the borough.

With regard to Brighton & Hove, older people normally travel within the city thanks to the effective transport network that connects Hove to Brighton. However, most residents of both localities tend to spend most of their time outdoors in their respective areas. Residents' geographical movements and distances depend on the purpose of the outing, for example they may want to visit the shopping area in Brighton that offers a wider variety of commodities or a smaller but less crowded shopping centre in Hove (Figure 8). Overall, the latter is a preferable shopping destination because of the more tranquil atmosphere, while Brighton is favoured for social gatherings and cultural activities, as the following quotes demonstrate:

> *Harriet*: If it was a terrible day and it was raining and horrible and windy, then I would think "Oh I'll go into Brighton" and I would look around the shops and see other people… because in the winter if you stay in you don't see anybody. But on a day like this (sunny and warm) I would have a walk along the seafront or something, on a nice day. But it depends, like if I'm meeting someone… like I may be meeting a friend tomorrow in Brighton. (72, Hove)

> *Max*: When it's really busy in Brighton I don't want to go there because it's too full of people, and yet it's fun, around spring time the town fills up with young people wearing bright colours, talking loudly, and that's fun, you feel that spring has come! (69, Hove)

> *Rebecca*: So this is Hove, the major street in Hove, and I do a lot of shops there (Figure 8).
> *Chiara*: Do you go more often to Brighton or Hove for shopping?
> *Rebecca*: Hove, it's further away but I can usually park in Hove and if I choose my time I can put my car in the Tesco car park for free.
> *Chiara*: Apart from parking, would you say you prefer Brighton or Hove?
> *Rebecca*: Hove is more relaxed and smaller, so you can easily walk all around it.
> *Chiara*: What do you mean by relaxed?
> *Rebecca*: It's not so busy, you don't need to be pushed and passed by people so much, and the shops are smaller so it doesn't get full of people quite so much. Yeah it's easier to walk around Hove. (Brighton, 62)

Figure 8 – Rebecca's photo of main shopping area, Hove

The first two quotes highlight the significance of seeing other people during ordinary outings, as Chapter 5 will discuss in more detail. They also suggest that the social and cultural vibrancy of Brighton is appreciated. Ziegler and Schwanen (2011) argue that mobility is a multidimensional concept. More specifically, they claim that mobility is not just a resource that facilitates access to places and accomplishment of everyday tasks, but its importance is accentuated even more by the potential offered to older people to experience mental and social engagement with difference. Although Max withdraws from Brighton at extremely busy times, he enjoys its vibe and he does not resist social change, rather he is intrigued by it. This is a feeling shared by many participants, with particular emphasis on the pleasure of age groups-mixing, since several informants report to enjoy being around youths because this keeps them aware of the transformations of society:

> *Alex*: I like if there are young people around, it lifts the place. I mean, I live in a block of flats where there were a lot of old people and now the old people have died and the young couples are coming in with children and I like to hear that - the sound of life, the future, children… not the silence of the grave (laugh). Perhaps I'm different, but I find it stimulating, they have a very refreshing attitude to society which I never developed: they are classless, they don't have any racial prejudice, they are not homophobic,

> whereas when I was brought up 50 or 60 years ago it was a different world, homosexuality you went to prison, you were hanged for murder, there was not one single black boy in my school. Even Brighton has changed completely. And it makes me liberal, I like that. (71, Brighton)

By looking at the mobility patterns in the two cities reported in Figures 9 and 10 it can be noticed that some areas are exceptionally busy, specifically the town centres, shopping areas, leisure centres and parks. Surprisingly, the seafront in Brighton is barely visited except for a couple of records on the West area of the Brighton West Pier and a few more cases of people who have been to the seafront but without the GPS (Figure 11). Andrew and Phillips (2005) have stressed that most gerontological literature emphasises seaside towns for their beneficial and therapeutic properties. Collective imaginary also associates them to "morally and spiritually uplifting virtues" (Blaikie 1997, p.629) that mirror an idyllic idea of traditional community values. To contrast this image, Agarwal and Brunt (2006) have found that seaside towns present higher levels of multiple deprivation than inland towns and they highlight in particular the level of social exclusion experienced in such resorts.[10] In their study, the city of Brighton & Hove figures as one of the most deprived seaside cities. Despite the discrepancy between the imaginary and reality, the romanticised conception of seaside resorts and the renowned health benefits that stem from living in proximity to the sea have encouraged many UK retirees to move to coastal towns, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s. Two facts drawn from the data must be stressed in this respect because they suggest a change of perception about seaside towns among today's older population. First, older people in Hackney do not wish to leave the city and nobody expressed the desire to retire to rural or coastal places. Second, older people in Brighton & Hove did not emphasise the proximity to the sea in their accounts nor do they avail themselves of it to a significant extent. Underlying these two findings may be the transformation of older people's expectations about what retirement life should be. The socio-economic deprivation of seaside resorts may play a significant role in older people's perception of such places. Related to this, older people's preferences and aspirations appear to have changed, and closeness to the sea nowadays may be more likely to represent an irrelevant factor in determining the key constituents of a pleasant and healthy retirement life.

10. The authors mention poor health and housing, poor skills, education and training, child poverty, low income and employment as the most relevant problems leading to social exclusion in seaside towns (Agarwal & Brunt 2006).

Figure 9 – Brighton centre, mobility activity of 25 people over 7 days

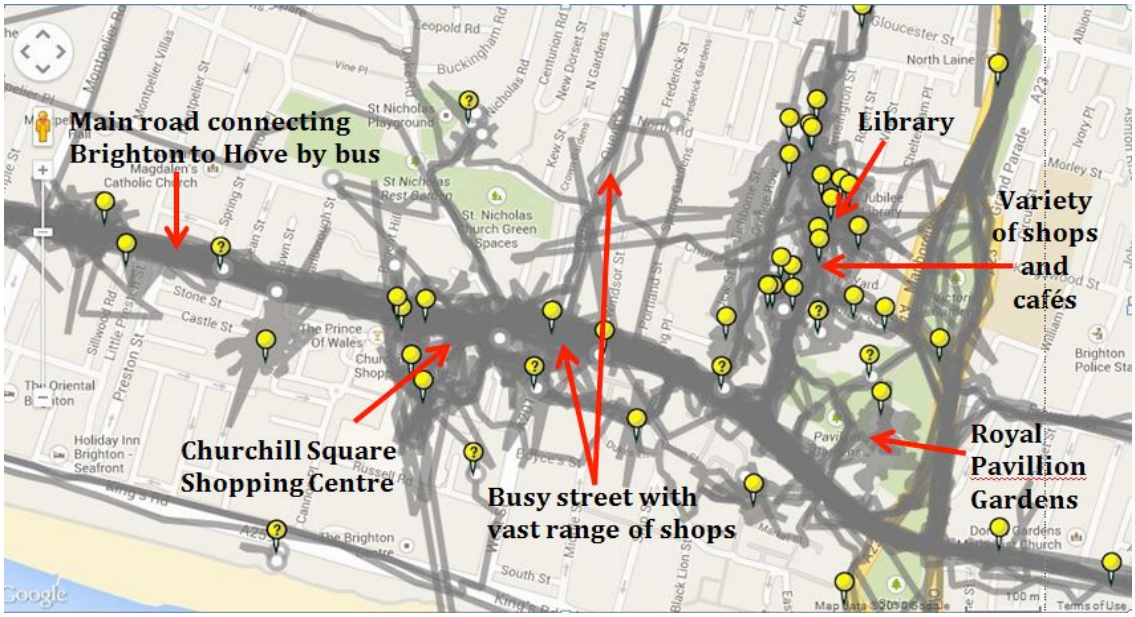
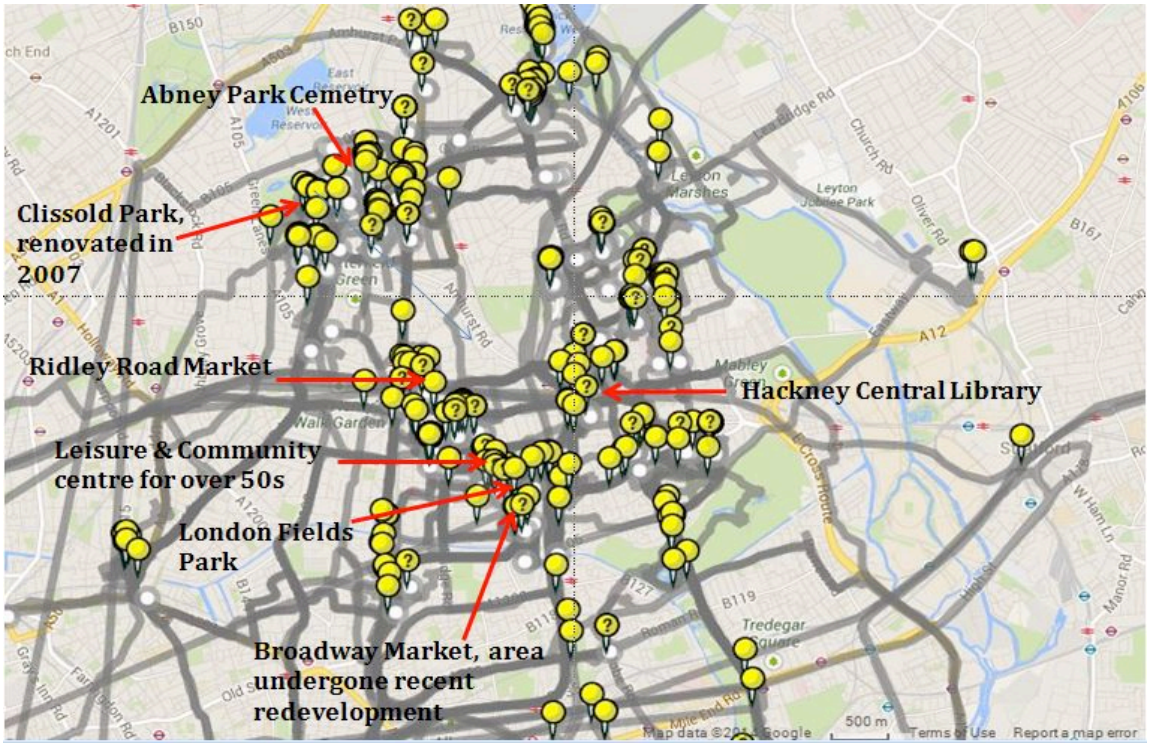
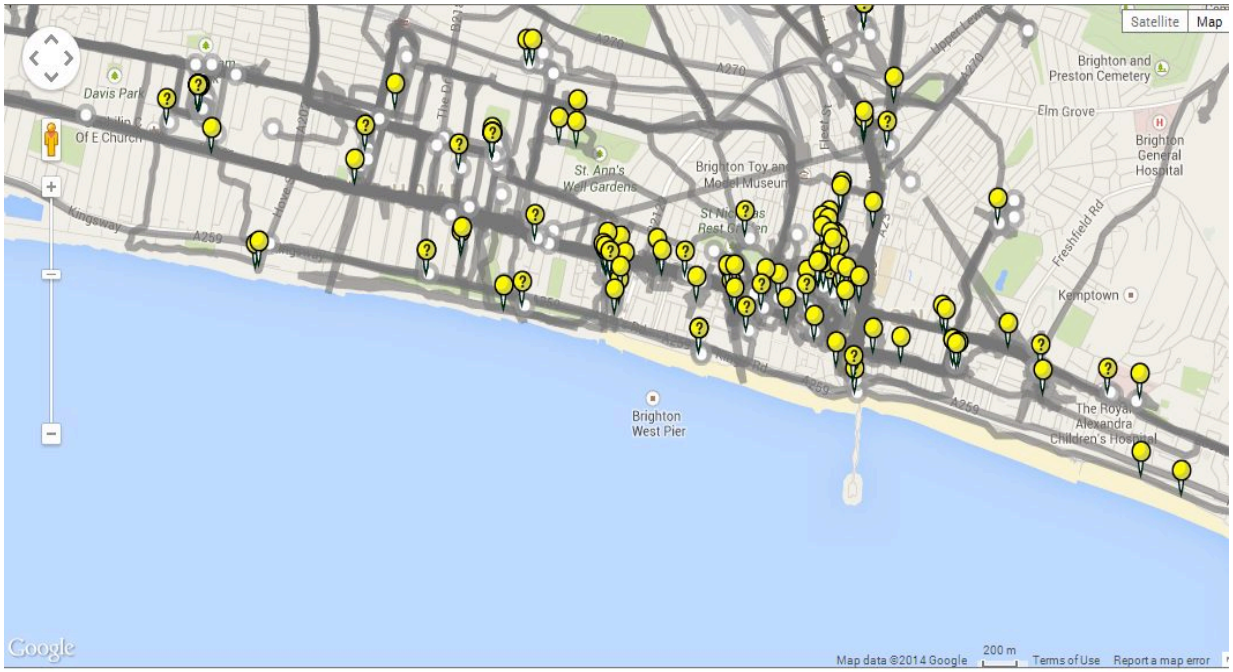


Figure 10 – Hackney centre, mobility activity of 25 people over 7 days



(Source: research data visualised on Google)

Figure 11 – Brighton & Hove, seafront mobility activity, zoom in



(Source: research data visualised on Google)

The density of movements displayed in the figures supports the survey data, which record that overall the respondents went out every day of the week. It also reflects older people's accounts of their everyday lives as busy and active, mostly in order to undertake daily tasks but also because of activities such as classes, hobbies, volunteering, social occasions and travelling. This result is consistent with Yen et al.'s (2012) findings that older people in good physical condition tend to be very active and they go out intentionally to preserve reasonable levels of mental and physical exercise. Moreover, similar to their data, this study supports the thesis that older people travel outside the residential neighbourhood for a variety of reasons, meaning that the immediate surroundings become a trivial location in the satisfaction of needs (Yen et al. 2012). Many people claim to be leading a busy life. They get involved in different activities, new interests stimulate them and they gain satisfaction by feeling in control of their lives:

> *Max*: My life now is as full and busy as it was before when I was working, if not busier than that, because when you retire you choose the rhythm, you choose the routine, you choose when to do things and what to do, whereas

> when you are working you have to keep to somebody else's procedures. (69, Hove)
>
> *Alice*: It's not just about being busy it's about having a creative life, you know? It's not just that I like being busy, because I like my own company! I actually used to spend quite a lot of time on my own because you know people in my household are still working or whatever so I spend and I like to spend time on my own, but if I were restricted about going out and about because I hurt myself or whatever… I'd feel frustrated. (71, Hackney)

In the excerpt above, Alice juxtaposes being busy with sociability. This may be because she is involved in leisure activities that involve close social contact with others (i.e., art classes at a community centre with a group of elderly women, acting with a local group). For Alice, keeping busy is not just about being able to undertake food shopping and similar everyday tasks, but rather it means being socially active and connected to other people. The multidimensionality of the concept of *mobility* is evident in her quote, given that mobility can deeply affect her socialisation and general wellbeing.

Although Hackney and Brighton & Hove encompass most of the movements registered by GPS logs, Figures 4 and 6 show that some journeys extend outside the perimeter of the two areas. Interviews reveal that some Hackney residents enjoy visiting other boroughs of London both for pleasure and necessity. This includes meeting relatives or friends for a meal, walking in a park, visiting them at their own residences, attending classes at adult education colleges in central London, visiting university libraries and attending cultural events at the South Bank Centre. In addition, several subjects claimed to travel outside the city to participate in meetings related to social, cultural and political activities. Hence, mobility empowers them to fulfil their roles as citizens by enabling them to participate actively in society. Indeed, this supports the idea that mobility plays a central role in fulfilling subjects' desire to be active part of civic life. With regard to the extent to which age seems to influence mobility (i.e., research question 3), Föbker and Grotz (2006) argue that "the younger elderly with good health show a particularly varied and spatially broad activity pattern" (p.115), and Gunnarsson (2009) finds that "age is the strongest influence on the level of activity" (p.34). Although the data collected in this study generally confirm that health and age are relevant factors, it finds also that long-distance journeys are not a luxury enjoyed exclusively by those in better health conditions. Moreover, a clear correlation between age and distance travelled

cannot be entirely supported with the data. Many people in their late 60s and 70s enjoy travelling outside the city; even Robert, Daisy and Alex who have severe walking difficulties and Iris with limiting back problems report exiting the reference areas. The following details of the long-distance trips suggest that positive disposition, personal interests and social connections are more relevant than age and health in explaining journeys to distant locations. In Hackney, Robert (72) and his wife drove to Seaford to their holiday house and stayed for a weekend, Benjamin (65) spent a day in Felixstowe with friends, Luke (62) went to South Downs National Park with wife and friends, Daisy (66) went to Bishop's Stortford with her husband to meet her relatives. In Brighton & Hove, Iris (79) went to Tunbridge Wells by train to meet a friend, Jacob (90) went to a market and other shops in Worthing (not recorded by the GPS), Alex (71) went to South Downs National Park with a group of elderly from a community centre and to Haywards Heath on a different day as he regularly volunteers at the Hospital, Eve (67) went to Eastbourne for a meeting with friends, Lucy (67) and her husband William (70) went to London to celebrate his birthday by going to a restaurant and art galleries (journey not recorded).

The transport dimension

Issues around transport constitute a significant part of participants' narratives about ordinary weekly outings. Therefore, they are investigated in this section through the analysis of survey and qualitative data. Hackney and Brighton & Hove are both vibrant urban centres. Nonetheless, they are characterised by different environmental features which impact older people's transportation preferences and habits. Brighton & Hove is a wide area and its bus service enables older people to reach distant points of interest spread within the city boundaries. Given that some parts of the city are rather hilly, cycling opportunities are scarce for older people and car and bus are the favoured means of transport. In contrast, Hackney is a much more contained area. It is a flat borough and similar to Brighton is very well served in terms of public transport. The flatness of this area provides the ideal scenario for cycling as well as walking. Although older people's mobility patterns have been recorded by portable GPS units, the records do not identify the mode of transport used, thus the distance travelled by each mode of transport cannot be investigated quantitatively.

Walking

Existing scientific studies and policy discourses generally emphasise the benefits of regular walking on older people's physical health and psychological wellbeing (e.g., Age UK 2013; Du Toit et al. 2007; Weuve et al. 2004). In the present research, walks in parks or in other types of natural environment (i.e., seaside in Brighton & Hove, along canals in Hackney) are a common practice among older people in both cities. Walking is certainly encouraged by the considerable volume of greenery in the two locations, which amounts to 98 parks and gardens in Brighton & Hove and 56 in Hackney. The maps in Figures 12 to 14 show the distribution of green areas in the two cities.

Figure 12 – Green areas in Brighton & Hove

City of Brighton and Hove

Source: Topography [GML2 geospatial data], Scale 1:1250, Tiles: GB, Updated: December 2013, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>, Downloaded: Wed May 07 11:55:10 BST 2014

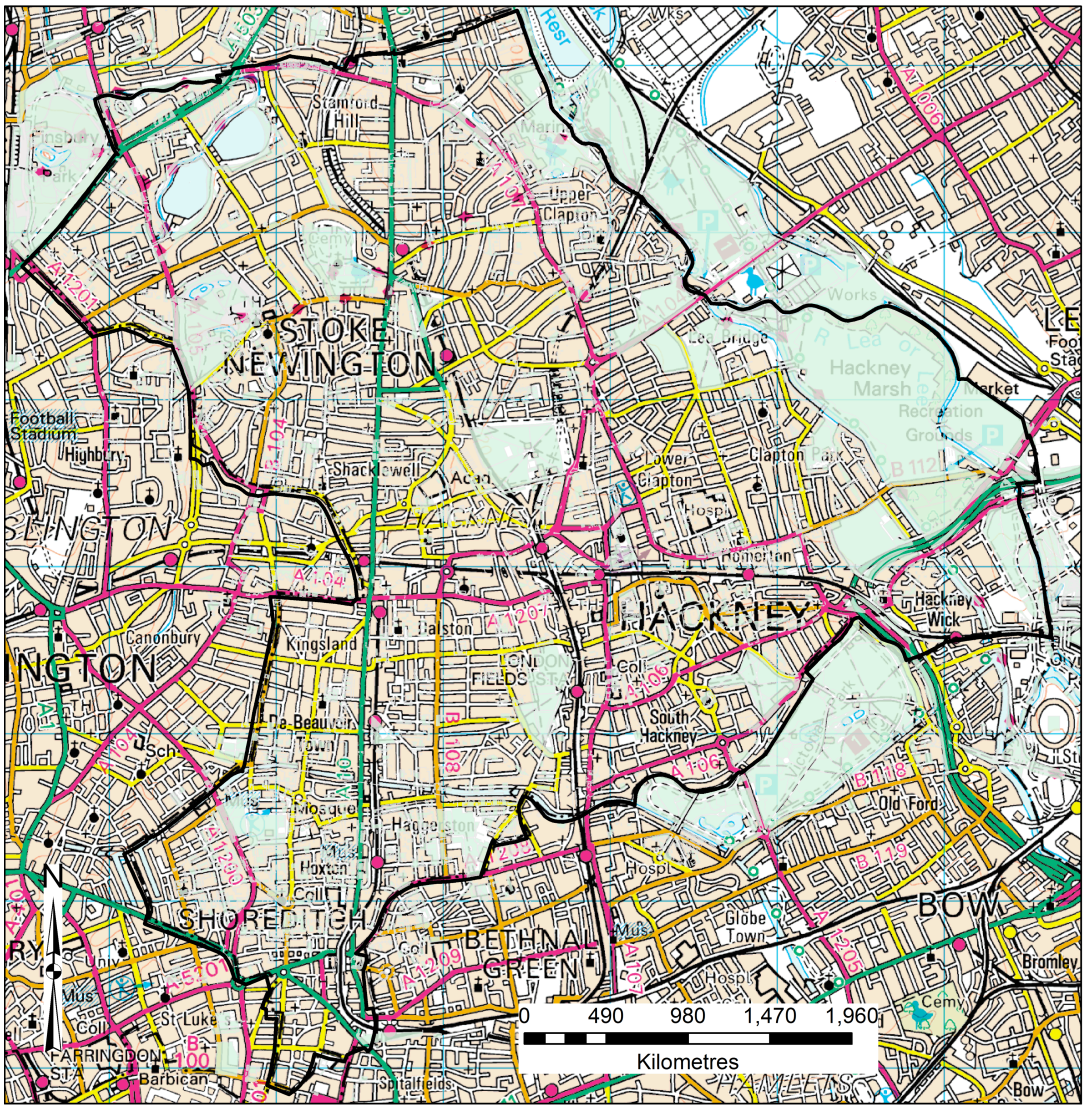
Figure 13 – Green areas in Brighton & Hove, city centre

Brighton and Hove, city centre

Source: Topography [GML2 geospatial data], Scale 1:1250, Tiles: GB, Updated: December 2013, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>, Downloaded: Wed May 07 11:55:10 BST 2014

Figure 14 – Green areas in Hackney

London Borough of Hackney



Source: Topography [GML2 geospatial data], Scale 1:1250, Tiles: GB, Updated: December 2013, Ordnance Survey (GB), Using: EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service, <http://digimap.edina.ac.uk>, Downloaded: Wed May 07 11:55:10 BST 2014

Survey results do not show significant differences in the total frequency of outings on foot in the two areas, although the distance covered by the participants may differ. In both cities the research subjects walked the same exact number of times, i.e. 126, calculated as the sum of all the ticked boxes labelled "foot" in the survey. As Table 19 reports, the majority of participants walked seven days a week in both locations (precisely, ten people in Hackney and eight in Brighton & Hove), highlighting the importance of daily walks to the respondents. However, it is necessary to stress that inaccuracies in participants' records may have occurred. Specifically, not all informants considered ticking the box "foot" for transitional walks, such as walks in between home, bus stops and destinations. Hence, records of actual walks are believed to be underreported in the survey results.

Table 19 – Frequency of total weekly walks

N of days a person walked over the week	Hackney	Brighton & Hove
0	1	0
1	1	0
2	0	1
3	5	4
4	2	6
5	4	4
6	2	2
7	10	8
Total	**25**	**25**

The participation to go-alongs and the daily use of GPS units encouraged the subjects to reflect upon their personal experiences of getting around and using different forms of transport. Walking emerged as the most important way to navigate the urban environment. First of all, walking is of major significance because it enables older people to reach independently destinations as well as rail stations or bus stops, and in so doing it allows them to expand their geographical life-space beyond the immediate household surroundings. The maintenance of independent mobility has also a remarkable impact on self-agency and self-esteem by enabling the old person to feel as an active and capable subject in society. Furthermore, being able to walk is an antidote to loneliness as it eases the maintenance of a network of friends and acquaintances thanks to the possibility to reach community centres or friends' places effortlessly and free of charge. As Martin's excerpt suggests, the ability to

navigate from one place to another provides also opportunities for pleasant and unexpected social encounters:

> *Martin*: Walking stimulates me, walking and meeting people like yourself and say "Hi" and "How you do"… I go into library and meet people, I go to Age Concern to the computing centre, I meet people for the first time and we exchange ideas and so on and we get to know each other. (72, Hackney)

Equally important is the psychological gratification that arises from doing some light physical exercise, even while combining it with another purpose such as shopping. Walking is described frequently in older people's accounts as a way to sustain good health and it easily becomes a routine as people make the point of walking a certain number of times per week with the purpose of preserving satisfying health conditions:

> *Luke*: I enjoy that minor exercise (laughs) to go to the corner shop on foot once or twice a week. (62, Hackney)

> *Sophie*: Walking makes you feel good. You feel good, you get endorphins going in the brain, it just feels good, and you feel virtuous afterwards as you think "Uuh I did some exercise today". And I usually have a purpose, I fit a purpose into it, like I go to the post office. (80, Brighton)

> *Chiara*: You do quite a lot of exercise during the week, don't you? Swimming, "Health Walks"… Is there anything else?
> *Lily*: Well, I try to walk three times a week. I walk to LIDL for shopping, then I walk to the church… (71, Brighton)

In line with other studies, this research finds that walking is not exclusively a way of moving from one place to another or a way to undertake some physical activity, but to some older people it is also an important resource that benefits indirectly other aspects of everyday life (Middleton 2011). This characteristic of walking practices is well exemplified in the case of Penelope and her husband. Penelope claimed to enjoy rambling through natural landscapes, but when questioned about whether she may join the local "Health Walks" (i.e., walks undertaken in group in parks or along the promenade and organised by Brighton & Hove Council and the NHS) she provided the following straight answer and motivation:

> *Penelope:* No, because my husband and I we like walking together, we are very happy doing that. It's a chance… I think we talk more on our walks than we do at home. I mean, obviously we talk, but in between times we are in different spaces and doing different hobbies. So if we go for a walk that might be a time when we discuss some issues on our mind, so walking is an important part of our relationship as well as a health thing. (64, Brighton)

To Penelope, the daily walk with her husband represents a unique opportunity to engage in conversation in a way that domestic dynamics normally limit within the home environment. In her considerations about urban walking practices, Middleton (2011) observes a link between walking and the different forms of dialogue that are associated with it. Specifically with regard to partners walking together, she finds that "their decision to walk is not based purely on environmental factors but on how walking affords them time to interact in a way other modes of transport do not allow" (p.2863). Rather than concentrating on walking as a mode of transport opposed to others, Penelope's decision not to join the group-walks because of her preference to walk with the husband highlights that a complexity of dimensions might constitute leisurely walking practices depending on whether these are undertaken in company of a partner, a group of people or in solitude. In Amelia's case below, the sociable dimension of walking is subordinated to her preference to walk alone. This is because walking alone enables her to maintain the desired independence with regard to routes taken, places visited and pace of walking:

> *Amelia*: I've got quite a few friends I go with, but if it's walking… I used to have a friend I fell out with because she was just… well a long story, but she used to walk like this (mimicking somebody who walks extremely slowly). But walking is something you can do on your own, and I prefer walking on my own because I am quite quick. I walk wherever I am going and *then* meet people. (…) I like walking, I just like walking to places I've not been before, because I'm not frightened as long as I can see a bus stop, and there are bus stops like mushrooms in London, so even if I'm getting lost… I like exploring the city because there are always little medieval streets you've never seen before, and… I just like walking, and I have several routes that I take to go to central London. (60, Hackney)

It is evident that Amelia prefers walking on her own to avoid the constrictions that stem by other people's presence and pace. She is a self-sufficient woman who never got married and who enjoys spending time on her own. Therefore, to a certain extent her walking practices reflect her independence, which is one of her strongest personality traits. Another dimension of leisure walking emerges in Stanley's comment. He talks about walking as a sociable opportunity. He admitted to join the "Health Walks" in Brighton & Hove on a regular basis precisely with the intention to encounter the other habitual walkers:

> *Stanley*: We meet there at 10:00, we walk, we get back there at 12:00 or whatever, then most of the people that have been on the walk go to have a tea or coffee and we gossip until 12:30 (laughs).
> *Chiara*: What's the most enjoyable part of the walk?
> *Stanley*: The gossip, oh the gossip! But the walk is good for your health. So you know they are both important. But today I phoned one of the people I walk with, and because this route is always quite muddy today it would be terrible, so I phoned her up and said "Are you gonna walk today?" and she was like "Mmmmh" so I said "Ok, let's not walk, I'll come and pick you up, we'll walk just the two of us to the cliff to Rottingdean and then we would go there to have coffee and meet the gang." (81, Brighton)

The emphasis in his account is put on the social aspect of walking and the camaraderie of group-walks. Stanley does not regard as equally pleasant a walk by himself and therefore he goes out for walks with company whenever he has a choice. By considering the three examples above, it is argued that older people do not simply regard walking as a convenient way to move between places or to undertake regular physical workout, but also as a pleasant opportunity for intimate conversation, reflection, exploration of the city, sociability and conviviality.

Cycling

In contrast to walking practices, there is sharp difference in the use of bicycles between the two areas. In Brighton & Hove only one participant used a bicycle during the week of research, whereas in Hackney seven people did. Moreover, the person who used the bike in Hove claimed that he normally cycles for pleasure along the seafront towards Shoreham-by-sea, which is a flat and pleasant journey. He stressed also that he does not cycle when the weather is inclement. On the other hand, subjects in Hackney normally use bicycles as an alternative way to reach destinations and not purely as a hobby. Certainly, Hackney residents are inspired to cycle by the presence of parks, canals and cycling paths combined with the strong emphasis on cycling urged by the local council and the London Cycling Campaign. According to figures form the Campaign, Hackney has the largest group of cycling members compared to all other London boroughs (Hackney Cycling Campaign 2013). The qualitative data gathered for this study suggest that cycling is an invaluable mode of transport among older people in urban areas. In Hackney, older people tend to use the bicycle as an alternative way of transport because of its convenience to navigate the urban fabric in terms of costs and velocity. The examples below show how closely cycling and everyday practices are connected in the London borough:

> *Evan*: I've been to the swimming pool on my bike. I enjoy cycling pretty much.
> *Chiara*: Is it something that you do on your own?
> *Evan*: It is something I tend to do to get to places, so I don't normally go out cycling with a friend, not very much anyway, it's just a convenient way of getting around really. Like yesterday although it was raining, I didn't like the idea very much, I had to find a TV cable and I went to Dalston and I cycled there. (Hackney, 85)

> *Benjamin*: That's the food boutique. Every time I buy a baguette I just go in there and they'll see me coming and they'll take the baguette down ready. I sometimes park my bike outside but I can't be bothered to lock it up so I stay by my bike and they bring the baguette outside and pay my money and then off we go. (65, Hackney)

> *Zoe*: I don't want to cope with the traffic, and the underground, I don't like that, that's what I don't like about London so I don't deal with it. I don't like travelling on the underground, I don't like travelling on buses, I don't like the buses stopping and going and all the people coming on and off and the traffic... Oh, horrible. I prefer going on my bike really. (Hackney, 60)

In Brighton & Hove, cycling seems to be a less attractive option because the presence of hilly areas discourages it as a mode of transport. Matthew is the only participant who appears to cycle regularly. He has always been a keen cyclist, he enjoys it as a physical activity and he likes riding for pleasure through beautiful landscapes. He photographed his bike and the scenery as he cycled along the sea (Figure 15). His narrative about biking contrasts with the accounts provided by the London cyclists, as it concentrates more on the poetry of cycling and the emotions it provokes rather than its functionality in accomplishing daily tasks:

> *Matthew*: I like biking, there is something about the rhythmatic movement of cycling and being in the fresh air, it's very relaxing, it's much better than walking I think (laughs). This is a lovely little ride, because it takes you to the river, it's a nice place so I stop there and look at the wildlife because there are lots of birds, seabirds. (70, Hove)

Figure 15 – Matthew's ride along the seaside, Hove

Due to the current popularity of cycling within the UK and to a general improvement of health conditions in later life, we can project a rising number of older people in urban areas who may decide to cycle over the next few years. Yet, at the time of writing, research on older people's experiences of cycling is limited, leaving scope for relevant investigations on this rather unexplored subject within geographical gerontology and transport studies.

Driving

In contrast to cycling, issues around car use in later life have been addressed extensively in scientific research (Ball 2006; Dickerson et al. 2007; Musselwhite & Haddad 2010). Indeed, access to a car can make a remarkable difference in the patterns of older people's mobility and their independence, especially in isolated communities. In urban centres, however, the need for a car may be less pressing due to the availability of alternative ways of transport and to possibly shorter distances to be covered to reach services and facilities. In this study, a slightly higher proportion of people travelled by car regularly in Brighton & Hove, as 10 people used it between four and six times during the week, whereas in Hackney only 5 participants did. This may be due to the different sizes of the two urban locations. Nevertheless, the same numbers of people in both areas (i.e., 10) travelled as passengers on someone else's cars during the course of the seven days. With regard to car availability, there are no significant differences in the two areas: in Brighton & Hove 16 participants own a car, 5 do not own one and 3 do not have a licence; in Hackney 15 participants own a car, 7 do not own one and 3 do not have a license. However, older people in Hackney tend to rely on cars especially for emergencies whereas overall they favour public transport. Interestingly, older people's accounts of travelling are focused less on car driving than any other way of transport. This is striking because it is at odds with the priority given by older people to the automobile among studies concerned with mobility in later life (Alsnih & Hensher 2003; Banister & Bowling 2004; Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 2001). Out of 31 participants who own a car, three subjects thought to photograph their vehicle because of the particular meaning that has been attached to it, i.e. a resource that connects them to different places and that allows for higher amount of freedom in their mobility patterns. These people live by

themselves and cannot walk for a prolonged period of time because of longstanding illness, therefore being able to drive is essential to maintain the desired mobility:

> *Iris*: I love driving, I always did. If they stopped me driving I don't know what I'd do, then I might become depressed. There are buses but you can't go very far really. (79, Brighton)

Iris' feelings however are an exception among the research subjects. Owing a car and being able to drive is indeed important to many older people, however the subjects did not depict the vehicle as absolutely necessary and the possibility of driving cessation does not concern them to the extent that might be expected. Among the participants who own a car, five people claimed that they only use it once a week to do the shopping at a supermarket to avoid carrying several bags and heavy weights. This is especially important for one woman living up on a hill in Patcham (Brighton), who would prefer walking to shops but she has to use the car to be able to carry home the shopping bags. In one particular case, the car is even used just for short trips to keep it functioning:

> *George*: On Fridays we used to go and get a DVD from Blockbuster for the weekend but then they closed down, it used to be a regular car thing just to keep the car on. But normally we use the bus, we always catch buses and train to go wherever we are going. (74, Hove)

The preference to use buses rather than cars is a context-specific result because bus networks are a realistic alternative to car travel in both cities. In less urbanised centres or in towns with insufficient transportation offer the car might play a more crucial role in people's mobility. Except for two people with major walking difficulties (i.e., Robert and Iris), the subjects tended not to use the car during the week and the most important aspect of having a car is the *possibility* to use it if needed. In other words, it is the awareness of the greater freedom that can be enjoyed in some circumstances, as the quote below suggests:

> *Jacob*: That's my car in the photo. I don't use it enough. You know, for parking problems in Brighton is easy to go on the bus, and last year I did 800 miles, not much in a year. It's nice to have it there though, if I want to go to a late night concert somewhere… (90, Hove)

Using buses

In this research, public transport such as buses and trains are considered as public places because of their characteristic of being social spaces accessible to various groups of the population. Although the quantitative data cannot explain the reasons behind individuals' choices, the qualitative data identify a marked preference for buses rather than the underground among older people in the London borough. In Brighton & Hove, many research subjects prefer going to nearby destinations such as Eastbourne or Worthing by bus, given that the national bus pass entitles them to free bus travel on local buses in the whole UK. Some participants complained about bus service, but overall the research subjects are satisfied with public transport and this is in contrast to other findings that depict older people as mostly disappointed about such service (Risser et al. 2010). Most participants in both locations mention the efficiency of bus service and they appear to be satisfied with its accessibility and punctuality:

> *Jack*: My journeys on buses are great, amazing! They have improved so much, they are so regular, you rarely have to wait for more than nine or ten minutes, and it's free for me. I can go anywhere, it's just fantastic, it's a joy of being old! (69, Hackney)

The majority of older people share similar excitement about bus service and free travel passes. Availability and efficiency of public transport consequently reduce older people's car dependency, which is important given that the interruption of the driving licence could deeply affect older people's mobility and independence as well as self-esteem. Among the participants, eight have taken a photo of bus stops as a significant public space in their everyday life, as Benjamin's words explain:

> *Benjamin*: What's important to me here is the bus stop. Thinking about places and spaces, thinking about the bus journey as being a public place, ehm… the number 73 bus from Stoke Newington into town is important to me symbolically. I don't use it very much but the 73 is kind of an icon because it connects into town, we don't have any tube station here. (65, Hackney)

Despite the higher probability of using buses rather than other modes of transport in both cities, in-depth interviews reveal that travelling by bus is not necessarily a positive experience even for those who regularly avail themselves of buses. To some, this is due to the physical instability that can be experienced when sitting or standing on a bus, which stops frequently and suddenly. To others, unpleasantness relates to unfriendly social interactions that may occur, an issue that has been stressed also in other studies (Risser et al., 2010). As argued by Biggs and Tinker, in thinking of older people-friendly urban environments we must realise that "social behaviour, attitudes and perceptions can be just as important as material conditions" (2007, p.9), even though their measurement is more slippery than the evaluation of environmental infrastructures and design. The qualitative data do not support a clear relationship between annoyance and age, gender or physical condition of the older person and it seems to depend on the individual's character and disposition to irascibility. These comments also highlight that the bus would be enjoyed as a form of locomotion if it were not for such annoyances:

> *Amelia*: You sometimes have very loud people on the buses, but the staff are very well trained to deal with them, most staff would throw them out. I feel quite safe on the bus, I feel safer on the bus than on the tube… and I'm not claustrophobic, we all feel more comfortable if we can see where we're going. (60, Hackney)

> *Chiara*: Are there places where you don't feel comfortable in going to?
> *Alice*: Well, yeah, using the public transport… I find the tube's OK except if you are going in a rush hour and it's very crowded. And the bus is great, I love going on bus, but there is always… well not always… but something going on there. (71, Hackney)

Nonetheless, a few older people claimed to enjoy the experience of bus travel, which can impact positively on their wellbeing and health, as underlined also by other studies (Coronini-Cronberg et al. 2012; Green et al. 2013; Wilson 2011). This research argues that a researcher normally can collect narratives of complaint more easily from those older people who feel a lack of respect and consideration from others rather than positive feedback from those who overall feel respected by the other users. In other words, the latter usually do not talk about other people's behaviours if that is perceived as considerate and respectful. Therefore, researchers should be cautious when portraying older people as victimised by the

ruthlessness of the general public because the danger is to generalise and represent only one side of people's perceptions. If anything, the qualitative data suggest that there is recognition among the interviewees that older people too are to be blamed for being rude on public transport. In their study on urban incivility, Phillips and Smith (2006) find that "'respectable' people such as the middle-aged and elderly were the most likely perpetrators of an everyday incivility, not minority youth" (p.898), challenging the stereotypical image of older people as indiscriminately polite and affable. Urban incivilities may occur especially on buses where interpersonal negotiation of limited space available is likely to lead to contestation:

> *Eve*: A lot of old people are… I mean you get some batty old dears getting on buses who are deeply unpleasant and you think "*Why* are you like this?", but then they may have mental problems as well, so… But if you sort of try to be pleasant to people I think usually you get back what you put in. (67, Hove)

> *Iris*: I think in part is also fault of older people, because they do tend to be rude themselves from time to time, and they expect special treatment but they can't have special treatments. (…) I've never had a problem, I've been lucky, but I have a lot of friends who say it's dreadful and they are treated differently bla bla bla… Well I wonder why? Are they rude themselves? (79, Brighton)

Using trains

As it might be expected, survey results show that Hackney residents used trains (including overground and underground which are available in the capital only) more frequently during the week compared to their fellows in Brighton & Hove (Table 20), and also that a higher number of participants in Hackney availed themselves of trains (Table 21). This is not surprising given the larger range of railway services that are available in Hackney, which are used even on a day-to-day basis to navigate between different parts of the borough and areas of London. There is only one underground station within the boundaries of Hackney that is located on the northern border with Haringey borough (i.e., Manor House station).

Nonetheless, there are numerous overground stops that connect to underground stations in neighbouring boroughs, making it easy for older people to access Islington & Angel and Liverpool Street underground stations, which are the most visited areas among the research subjects.[11] The underground is not popular among the participants and nobody uses it other than out of necessity. The reasons given by the participants relate to the claustrophobic feeling that can be experienced, the crowd and the occasional long flights of stairs. Instead, the overground is used and enjoyed by a vast group of participants given that the bright and spacious coaches do not induce a sense of distress. Older people in Brighton & Hove may use local railway stations for visits to localities outside the city boundaries (e.g. villages/towns where their relatives and friends reside or holiday destinations), which does not usually happen on a daily or even weekly basis.

Table 20 – Number of residents in Hackney and Brighton & Hove who use railways (i.e., trains, underground and overground)

Frequencies of rail use	Hackney	Brighton & Hove
0	11	21
1	5	3
2	5	1
3	1	0
4	1	0
5	1	0
6	1	0
Total	**25**	**25**

Table 21 – Frequency of bus and train/underground use in both cities

Transport	Min		Max		Sum	
	Hackney	***Br & Hove***	***Hackney***	***Br & Hove***	***Hackney***	***Br & Hove***
Bus	0	0	7	7	74	81
Train/Underground	0	0	6	2	33	5

11. Rail network that resembles the underground but which runs above the ground. In contrast to the underground, the coaches are brighter, more spacious and connected to each other without interruptions.

The qualitative data suggest that older people prefer using trains rather than buses. The train is mostly described as a treat, first because buses are used more frequently as people normally travel locally and second because trains are expensive unlike buses which are free for the over 60s. Trains, like buses, are another public place where casual social interactions take place naturally. Although the interviewees reported episodes of unpleasant encounters also on trains, their accounts of train travelling are less concerned with incivilities if compared to experiences of bus travelling. Narratives about trains emerge most among the participants in Brighton & Hove, who are more likely to use the railway to reach nearby towns and the capital. The following examples demonstrate how the train allows the traveller to indulge in the comfort of the unusual experience:

> *Sophie*: Oh trains are my favourite thing in the world, oh…
> *Chiara*: What do you like about trains?
> *Sophie*: The luxury, the gentle speed, the fact that you can walk about, there is nothing restricting, beautiful views, and warm and comfortable, they come around with coffee... (80, Brighton)

> *Alex*: I love trains, you can just sit and relax… Well, you used to be able to say relax but now you sit and "I'm on the train" (mimicking someone on the mobile phone), which is not so good (laughs). On the train you are absolved form the personal responsibility of driving and navigating, you just sit there and look out the window, it's fast… and expensive! (71, Brighton)

> *Grace*: I enjoy train travel because you are going through the countryside, which I like to look at, and it tends to be quieter. You know, there's a lot going on on the bus, people getting on and people getting off, kids shouting, teenagers being noisy… (64, Brighton)

The most appreciated element of trains is the tranquillity and pleasant atmosphere that contrasts with people's experiences of chaotic buses, although the contrast is probably more accentuated in people's accounts than in the everyday reality of train travelling. Normally, the train is used by older people for one-day expeditions or to reach distant relatives or holiday destinations, thus the travel time spent on a train constitutes part of the pleasure of journey and this may distort the image that older people have about trains.

Given all these considerations on transportation, it is doubtless that living in an urban area has advantages for older people in terms of public transport and mobility. Good public transport networks support mobility beyond the neighbourhood and the urban area, offering the chance to see different things to those who enjoy visiting nearby localities. The excerpts below are meant to provide some examples of how accessibility and reliability of public transport can encourage older people to widen their mobility boundaries and avail themselves of what the city has to offer. These comments show also that transport networks provide additional opportunities for socialisation and quality time with friends or relatives:

> *William*: Charlie and I had been to Eastbourne recently with another friend of ours to see another friend of ours, in a pub (smiles). We went by bus, and we should be going to Eastbourne again next month but who knows we might decide to have an afternoon out. There is a nice art gallery in Eastbourne, they've got quite a collection of art works on their own. (70, Hove)

> *Luke*: There's something strange about it being in King's Cross (a snooker club, Figure 16), it's quite a long way just for a game of snooker, but it gets me out of my immediate surroundings. And obviously is not a very good district, you know, there used to be lots of low-life types, there would be prostitutes, drunks… But it's interesting, I would come out and have a cigarette and watch the world go by (smiles). (62, Hackney)

> *Charlotte*: We went to Liverpool Street area (Figure 17). It is quite good to be able to do everything, my husband did his glasses, I did the post office and the hairdresser, we went to a pub and then we went to Spitalfields and we had lunch there. It is something we do, a mini-day out. (63, Hackney)

Figure 16 – Luke's photo of a snooker Club in Kings' Cross, London

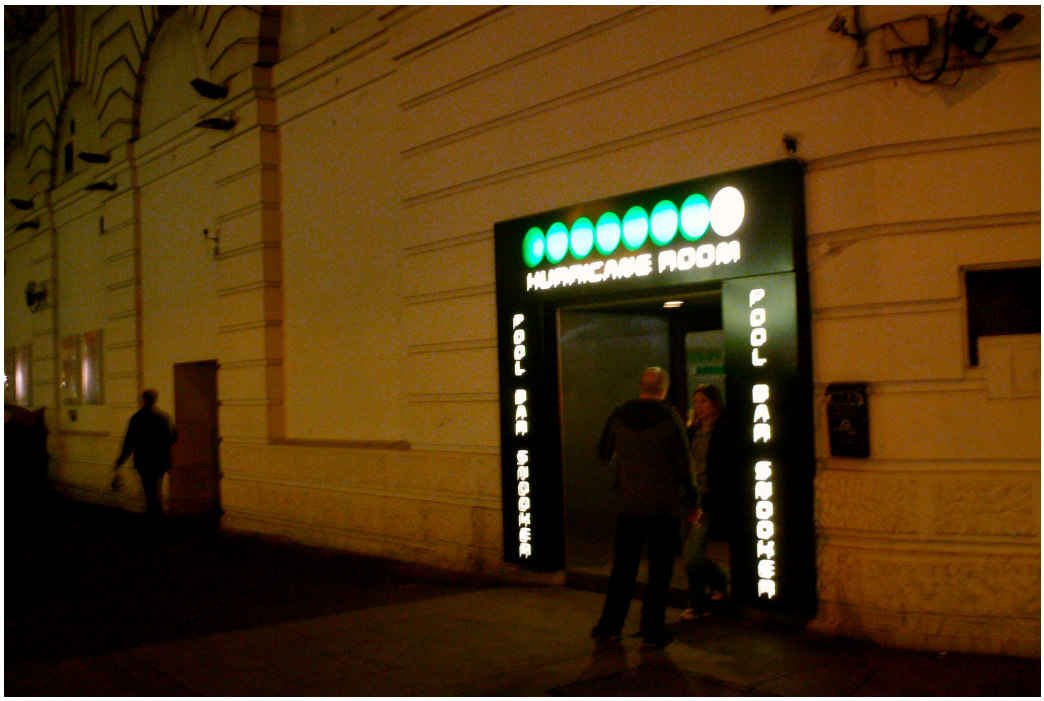


Figure 17 – Charlotte's photo of a day-trip to London Liverpool Street and Spitalfields Market, Hackney (in the photo, Charlotte's husband)

As well as considering how the environmental settings can affect people's transportation patterns, it is important to investigate whether participants' personal characteristics influence transport choices. To do so, a multivariate regression on each possible mode of transport was run, including simultaneously gender, age group, marital status, education, ethnicity, household composition and contacts with children/relatives as independent variables. Only a few coefficients on this set of variables are significant. First of all, by looking at how personal factors may influence the probability to use public buses, the results suggest that married participants are more likely to use buses than singles, but also that those who live by themselves tend to use buses more frequently than those who live with others (Table 22). Although this may look as a contrasting finding, it should be acknowledged that there are at least eight subjects who live by themselves but have a partner who does not live in the same household (the number may be even higher but only eight people explicitly mentioned a partner living elsewhere). This might lead to conclude that couples – whether they are married or not – generally use buses more than singles.

The second result is that the older participants are less likely to walk during their journeys outdoors than younger groups of participants; as people get older, also the probability to use the car decreases steadily (Table 23). The other factors do not seem to play a decisive role in determining the modes of transport used by the participants. For instance, it could be expected that the presence of relatives (whether living at home, nearby, in other regions or countries) would impact on transport choices, for instance by going by train to another town to visit them. Instead, the statistical output does not support any significant correlation. However, it is possible that the short timeframe considered by the survey (i.e., one week) does not capture potential correlations that may emerge with more prolonged observations of people's mobility patterns.

Table 22 – Influence of marital status and presence of relatives in the house on probability to use buses

Bus use	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Z	P>|z|
Married/Civil partnership	.862	.444	1.94	0.052
Live by themselves	.880	.366	2.40	0.016
cons	-2.109	.732	-2.88	0.004

Table 23 – Influence of age on probability to walk and use a car

Walk	Coeff.	Std. Err.	Z	P>|z|
Age	-.519	.176	-.2.95	0.003
cons	2.254	.841	2.68	0.007
Car use	**Coeff.**	**Std. Err.**	**Z**	**P>|z|**
Age	-.433	.226	-1.91	0.056
cons	-1.487	1.310	-1.13	0.257

Travelling for holiday and pleasure

Increased life expectancy in many countries means that people are ageing more healthily with consequent higher opportunities to remain active and mobile for longer. This process may encourage older people's chances and desire to travel not only within the city but also to more distant destinations, which is something that several participants did during the week of observation (see p.99). Although the data collected for this study register one specific week in the life of each subject and thus are not longitudinal, they nonetheless reveal an interesting increase in travel activity after retirement for at least 15 research subjects. This is in contrast to Gunnarsson's (2009) research, which finds that older people are no longer interested in travelling, especially because of difficulties in finding companionship. The qualitative data show that those people who claimed to be travelling more frequently for holidays are enabled to do so by the reduced time constraints and less pressing domestic responsibilities, e.g. grown-up children no longer in need of care. By looking at the interviews it emerges that two

men in their 80s express a stronger intention of travelling abroad compared to other people in their 60s and 70s, even though the intention may not necessarily materialise and may remain an aspiration. This might be determined by the desire to visit as many places as possible before physical conditions will impede to do so, and it manifests the willingness to defeat general perceptions of ageing as a process of physical decay and emotional resignation:

> *Chiara*: When was your last trip abroad?
> *Stanley*: Last September, I went to the North West Passage in the Canadian Arctic Ocean, for 12 days.
> *Chiara*: On your own?
> *Stanley*: Yes, and this year in March I'm going to Norway trying to see the aurora, with my lover. We both want to see the aurora. (81, Brighton)

> *Evan*: What I'm tempted to do it's just rent out the flat and go travelling.
> *Chiara*: Where would you like to go?
> *Evan*: Around the world, really, you know. I haven't done a lot of travelling, that's why. I've been to France quite a lot, to America a couple of times, and that's about it really. Since my daughter is in New Zealand I think I might spend some time there. I think I'd like to travel in the States, because I don't have to cope with foreign languages you see. (85, Hackney)

Participants in their 60s and 70s enjoy going for a vacation trip regularly (generally once or twice a year) if economic and physical conditions allow. Especially – but not exclusively – they appear to travel to UK destinations, mostly because of financial constraints that may limit the spectrum of destination opportunities. Several men and women in the sample claimed to feel less confident than in the past when they travel to unfamiliar places. Since reduced personal confidence might lead to insecurity and fear over personal safety, some participants manifest a more planned approach to travelling compared to previous periods of their lives. In such cases, the detailed organisation of the trip may help overcoming pre-travel anxiety, promoting instead a sense of security and comfort. For instance, the subjects report examining the map of the area in advance and ensuring safe ways of transfer from the station to the holiday home. Similar preparation strategies to overcome anxiety and confusion have been described in a study by Phillips et al. (2013), where informants explained that they felt more confident if they studied the area in advance in books and maps and they checked out places beforehand.

Financial security also helps sustaining people's sense of safety as it minimises the probability of being unprepared in the occurrence of sudden inconveniences:

> *Charlotte*: When you're young and you travel without much money it's a bit more challenging because you can't just take a taxi, you have to find your way to the local bus to get you from here to there, but when you're older if you have enough money to know that if there's an emergency you can get a taxi straight to the hotel... (63, Hackney).

In addition, a few people reported going for holiday to the same destination every year either in the UK or in Mediterranean countries. The decision to go to the same place is due in part to the desire of reducing travel-related stress and in part to progressive increase of a sense of attachment to the environment, both to places and people. This again relates to the increased importance of security and safety as defining features of the journeys rather than improvisation and risk. It emerges also that other subjects undertake trips that require a certain amount of spirit of adventure and that may also involve different forms of physical activity (e.g., hiking, hill climbing and horse riding), as shown by the quotes that follow:

> *Edward*: I'm going off to Spain with a group of people in November and we are riding there for a week.
> *Chiara*: Is horse riding something you took up since you retired?
> *Edward*: No, I actually quite like it, I started when I was about 30, I always wanted to do it but I didn't have time, and money was a problem because it's expensive. (…) I've been around the world riding, South America, Africa in six different countries there, Australia twice, Mongolia twice.
> *Chiara*: When did you last go?
> *Edward*: Last time we went to Argentina two years ago. (70, Hackney)

> *Grace*: I went for some hill climbing in Cumbria last year and this year I did the West coast of Scotland, which was awesome, absolutely amazing. I stayed in a cottage in the middle of nowhere with a girl friend, there was no internet connection, no phone, no television, it was so liberating, so liberating! So I was completely out of touch for those two weeks. And we went climbing, it was fabulous. As a result of that I did two charity runs (…)

> and also – it wasn't intended, but for the things that I saw when I was climbing – I've taken up bird watching a lot. (64, Brighton)

The last few quotes are not meant to suggest that the undertaking of such unconventional journeys eschew a previous detailed planning process. Instead, they underline people's perception of ageing not as a process of inescapable social and geographical withdrawal but rather as an opportunity to engage with new things, acquire skills and visit unfamiliar places embracing a lifelong learning perspective (Gabriel & Bowling 2004).

To conclude this chapter, the sample of participants is composed of healthy and active individuals who go out frequently during the week, in particular for everyday purposes such as going shopping or for a walk. Second, the high frequency of outings with physical and wellbeing purposes highlights the importance assigned by the participants to maintaining good health given that health and independence are closely connected, and independence is an invaluable factor in older people's quality of life. Third, there are no major differences between Hackney and Brighton & Hove on a number of mobility-related issues, leading to conclude that the diversity of the two areas in terms of services, infrastructures and natural environments may not play a determinant role in older people's everyday activities. A further conclusion regards research question 3. Precisely, it is found that the urban dimension does not necessarily lead to older people's spatial restriction in the home or neighbourhood and to the potential of social isolation. Rather than a shrinking of older people's geographical and social life spaces, the respondents express a clear interest and determination in maintaining a wide range of social relationships and in getting involved with new activities and people. In addition, a number of significant exceptions have highlighted that besides being mobile and active explorers of the city some older people cover extensive geographic distances beyond the urban perimeter, and that the reasons for such journeys relate principally to social activities (e.g. meeting relatives, spending time with friends, involvement in civic groups, cultural and political interests). Therefore, the urban environment not only offers the essential facilities to accomplish daily tasks, but it enables older people to maintain and expand their social connections, undertake physical activities and to pursue new hobbies. Overall, the analysis suggests that urban areas can be advantageous places to grow old. With regard to research question 3, it appears that age and health do not necessarily have to affect older people's mobility or their chances to avail themselves of the city. Instead, a positive and proactive attitude to later life emerges as a decisive determinant.

Chapter 5 – The everyday sociability of the city

Social interactions – nuanced interpretations and manifestations

This section addresses the first research question through the detailed investigation of older people's narratives on everyday sociability outdoors. Gerontologists and practitioners agree that social relationships and outdoor activities have a positive influence on older people's quality of life in terms of increased physical health and psychological wellbeing (Burton & Mitchell 2006; Day 2008; Fiori et al. 2008; Hanson & Emlet 2006; Kelly 2012; Mollenkopf et al. 1997; Open Space Research Centre 2011; Phongsavan et al. 2013). Socialising has been regarded as one of the most significant reasons for getting out in later life (Burton & Mitchell 2006; Newton et al. 2010). The implicit assumption underlying these studies is that older people necessitate outdoor social interaction mostly because they might experience more chances to feel lonelier than younger adults or youths. However, in contrast to the *socioemotional selectivity theory* (cf. Chapter 2), the qualitative data of this research find that the vast majority of older people describe themselves as more sociable since retirement. When participants were asked about it, they interpreted "being sociable" as a proactive and regular engagement with other people – both friends and acquaintances – beyond the domestic environment. The finding is not explained as a mechanism to prevent loneliness, but as a result of increased confidence and overall indifference to other people's judgments, which prompt older people to engage in new enjoyable relationships. With regard to loneliness, Dykstra (2009) has argued that it is common mostly among the very old, according to longitudinal data on changes in older adults loneliness. Similarly, Lawton (2001) argues that:

> "Recent research on age and emotions contradicts stereotypes of older people as affectively blunted and particularly depressed by illness and losses. (...) Like everyone else, they experience good and bad moods, but in no way do they feel selectively powerless or defeated." (p.123)

Although the importance of regular social contacts outside the domestic environment cannot be disputed as it is essential to prevent loneliness, depression and the overall deterioration of quality of life, it does not follow that those older people who are perfectly able to go out do

wish for more social interaction than they already experience. This research finds that while social connection to relatives and friends is important to all research subjects, a high number of participants claim that social contact with neighbours and strangers is not the primary purpose of their everyday outings. This is in contrast to other studies, as Day (2008) finds that unplanned social interactions are as important to older people as structured ones, Gardner (2011) claims that relationships and interactions with familiar strangers met in the neighbourhood "contribute substantially to older residents' well-being" (p.269). Similarly, Green et al. (2013) argue that one of the reasons why older people in London enjoy using buses is to maximise opportunities for socialisation with strangers, and Galčanová and Sýkorová (2014) find that older people in Czech Republic nostalgically regret the "past communities" where neighbours knew each other and where a willingness to co-operate and social cohesion were stronger (p.14). Instead, the result of this research is in line with Yen et al.'s (2012) study which finds that older people do not inevitably want to interact with their neighbours, and neither it finds nostalgia as a characteristic of older people's narratives about neighbourliness. The present research supports other authors who challenge the dominant connotation of social interactions as unquestionably positive. In other words, theses studies stress that interactions are not always of a friendly nature and that older people can even instigate negative sociability in public places (Du Toit et al. 2007; Phillips & Smith 2006; Thrift 2005). Notwithstanding the value given to random outdoor interactions by numerous older people, a significant proportion of participants do not appear to be affected by this type of social contact. It is noteworthy that during the interviews the respondents never frame their stories of everyday public life around social interactions with strangers or familiar strangers. Instead, they have to be asked explicitly about their experiences and what they think or feel about those fleeting encounters. In many cases, people claim that they never think about it and they are not able to give any answer; others provide more articulate responses. There are two aspects to be highlighted about this consideration, one is the trivial significance assigned to that sort of sociability, which is discussed throughout this section. The second aspect is people's difficulty to recognise and interpret "the everyday" because its definition is built on habitual and unnoticed practices. In this regard it is worth mentioning Latham (2003), who underlines how researchers need to acknowledge that individuals' accounts about the sociability of public spaces may "appear *indistinct*, *self-contradictory*, or *incomplete*" (p.2000) given that people do not normally think about embodied, non-cognitive and routine aspects of their lives.

The examples below report three answers given to the question "Is it important for you to meet people and to see people around when you go out?" that was used as a prompt to start conversations about the subjects' everyday social encounters. The excerpts are emblematic of those participants who claim not to be particularly interested in experiencing random social interactions when they navigate public spaces:

> *Ben*: No, I'm not bothered about it. It always happens you know, you always meet people, but I don't purposely go out to meet people. I am quite happy with my circle of friends and people I know. (72, Hackney)

> *Alexander*: Not in the slightest.
> *Chiara*: Among the places you go to, is there any that encourages social interaction?
> *Alexander*: No, not in the cafés, I would probably not go if they did (laughs). I like a shop where they are very friendly and they ask you "Do you want any help?" and if you just say no they leave you alone, so that's good. If you shop you don't want to feel someone is hovering over you hoping to sell you something. (63, Hackney)

> *Iris*: It's important for me to be able to meet and talk to *intelligent* people, *interesting* people, I'm not very good at talking about nappies and shops, I never was, I like people I can learn from. (79, Brighton)

Although the immediate responses to the question are indicative of participants' feelings on the matter, it is acknowledged that reality is more nuanced and the same people may have different and at times contrasting attitudes towards others in public spaces. For instance, the same person might like to be left alone while shopping or on the bus, but may enjoy a chat while waiting for the show to begin at the theatre. A number of participants enjoy the casual and occasional exchange of words with a cashier at the till, or the chitchatting at the bus stop. However, answers to this question highlight that the opportunity to experience unplanned interactions is to all participants a result of an outing rather than a motivation to go out, in contrast to other research (see Green et al., 2013).

The quotes above indicate that passing social encounters can be perceived as frivolous and trivial. However, the comments "I like a shop where they are friendly" and "It always happens" suggest that this kind of social interaction is expected and that it may play a positive role at a

less conscious level. Even though older people may not necessarily wish to experience verbal interactions, they enjoy the presence of others in public spaces. Spending time out of the home and the undertaking of daily tasks have two functions, i.e. *inclusion*, because it is a way to be part of society, and *control*, because it allows seeing what is going on in the local area. As Kazmierczak and James (2007) have argued with regard to green spaces, "[b]eing among others, seeing and hearing them, implies positive experiences and offers alternatives to being alone" (p.357). This consideration can be extended to other public arenas in the city and it reflects the experiences narrated by the participants to this study, whose ambivalence of feelings towards others' presence in public spaces highlights the nuances of older people's sociability and the complexity of perceptions (see also section "Alone together", p.149).

The pleasure of a kind gesture

Although this research finds that minor social interactions with others in public places are not something searched intentionally by the majority of them, it recognises that such contacts can be meaningful and affect older people's perception of self in a positive way. For instance, the following quotes are taken from three informants who claimed that meeting people when they are out and about is not necessary. However, their statements reveal the gratification felt in brightening someone else's day with an act of kindness:

> *Chiara*: How important it is for you to meet people when you go out?
> *Jack*: It is not important at all but I always do. I am not counting on them, I am not depending on them, I don't need anything back from them. And I always do because I can't stop myself cracking a joke or, you know, if I see a beautiful woman walking on the street I say "You are looking wonderful today" and just walk on. And I love doing that because occasionally I look back and if they are smiling that's it. (69, Hackney)

> *Evan*: There is a health food shop down there, run by a guy called Brian, I don't buy very much there but I always like to chat and ask questions and get people talking.

Chiara: Why is that?

Evan: It makes it more interesting, you know? For the staff... I feel often they are ignored, it's just a transaction, so I think it's nice to bring in a bit of humanity really. There is one checkout girl, I mean she is not all that friendly so one day I said "Oh your hair looks nice, it's different today" and she was very chatty you know. (...) Not always, I mean often I am like every other Londoner, always too many people, I get the transaction done and get on with my life. (85, Hackney)

Lily: It's nice if you appreciate how people are… If they are nice I do try. Even with bus drivers, there had been two bus drivers since I came here which I've taken their number and reported them for good behaviour because they had gone beyond the call of duty in looking after people on a precise day. One of them opened the door – he didn't have to, he was ready to pull away – and I think this person didn't speak English or didn't know where she was going, and he took the time and the trouble to give her directions, and I just thought it was nice that somebody should bother, so I told him he was nice. I think it is *important* because it gives them encouragement, that it has been worthwhile. (71, Brighton)

A sense of empowerment emerges in particular from the second and third excerpts, where the two informants are clearly aware of the beneficial impact of their comments and as a result feel that they have been useful in lifting the spirit of the workers. Thus, these social interactions can have a positive effect on self-esteem and agency, helping to re-confirm the identity of the old person within society. Moreover, the same excerpts disclose implicit perceptions of city life as rather individualistic; however, as Evan clearly demonstrates, many older citizens are conscious of having been absorbed by that lifestyle themselves, a lifestyle that is often associated to London and other large conurbations. Nevertheless, the vast majority of research subjects do not wish to move elsewhere, including those people who complain about the busyness and the hustle and bustle of urban life, meaning that the perceived individualism of the city is not considered as a threat to their quality of life.

The "bumpability" of places

Scharf et al. (2005) argue that "the future of old age will, to a large degree, be determined by the extent to which living in cities is made a tolerable and enjoyable experience" (p.85). This is because urban and suburban environments will accommodate an increasing number of older people over the next couple of decades. The authors warn that a significant proportion of people aged 75 years old and older who live in disadvantaged urban environments may experience a greater sense of being trapped by urban decay. However, an alternative and more optimistic view may be that highly urbanised areas could offer the resources to provide vibrant public places that satisfy older citizens' demands for relaxation, enjoyment and sociability. The areas of Hackney and Brighton & Hove are interesting case studies to test this hypothesis, as they are embedded in highly urbanised environments that in some parts have undergone recent regeneration whereas other areas remain considerably deprived. The previous section stressed that among the 50 participants nobody expressed feelings of dissatisfaction about living in the city, nor did they express the feeling of being trapped by urban decay, similarly to recent findings by Galčanová and Sýkorová (2014) in relation to the local environment of older people in Czech Republic. This is significant because it challenges the assumption diffused among gerontologists that the urban environment is not advantageous for the older population, an issue that has been raised and opposed by Phillipson and Scharf (2005). Rather than feeling trapped, the vibrancy of the city and the opportunity to access a wide range of amenities may give older people an emotional boost that stems from feeling part of society, which can also prevent them from feeling lonely or worthless:

> *Megan*: I like the urban streets, I like the people on the pavements out walking. The energy I think. Where I grew up there was hardly anybody walking on the streets after 5:00 pm and the shops were not so frequented and there were no people around… I think it's great to have people around, people say hello, they are doing different things, it's busy and I love it. There is all variety of people out there. (...) How does it make me feel? Well, not so lonely really! Here there is always a concert in a church or there is an art display and all those sorts of things all the time. (64, Hackney)

> *Jacob*: There's something for all ages here. I like music and there are plenty of opportunities! Last night I went to a jazz supper… It's quiet now as I'm part of the U3A and it's midterm now, so a week off. Saturday I'm going to a music concert, it's classical music in one of my music clubs, and Sunday morning I'm going to a jazz breakfast (laughs). (90, Hove)

Cities offer countless opportunities to those who are still healthy and proactive in looking for things to do. Not only can the city supply a wide range of activities that enable the older citizens to meet new people, but it provides also occasions for unplanned social interaction with strangers and acquaintances. As mentioned in the previous section, occasional interaction does not represent a motivation itself for getting outdoors and it is often disregarded or overlooked by the older people involved in the study. Nevertheless, the *bumpability* of cities' streets and places – as one research subject defined the chance to bump into people outdoors – can add extra vitality to the outing experience. Even when the interaction is not pleasant (as long as it is not conflictual), it may nonetheless stimulate older citizens and make them feel part of the collectivity. As an example of this, both men and women in the research sample claimed to find it embarrassing to be offered the seat on the bus because the gesture makes them conscious of the ageing process. Yet, despite the embarrassment caused by such a common situation, many people were amused when they described specific anecdotes and they find hilarious the ways in which the general public treat them on public transport:

> *Joseph*: I am aware that I am getting old when I get on the tube, I feel that's ridiculous but people get up – younger women! – and say "Do you want to sit?" (laughs), I find it embarrassing and normally I say "Don't bother", but if it's a young man aged between 12 and 16 I take the opportunity and sit down (laughs). (68, Hackney)

> *Iris*: The first time somebody gave up a seat I thought "I don't know if I like this, I don't know if I want to be treated like this" so I said to her "Do I look that old?" and she said "No, you just look very tired" and I thought that was a good answer (laughs). (79, Brighton)

The fact that a participant recalls the event and tells it to the researcher with evident amusement means that although this kind of ordinary chance interaction is not constructive

or particularly enjoyable, it can have a long-lasting influence and can make the person think of the situation and its meaning in a reflexive way. Wilson's (2011) claim that the bus is an emblematic site of public engagement is supported by this research. Indeed, not only many participants experience casual interactions with strangers on buses, but they adopt also a range of tactics to negotiate the available space, as it is implied by Joseph's different response to a teenager's and an adult's offer. However, in considering the data of this research it can be argued that the extent to which bus travelling has a positive influence on older people's general wellbeing appears to be considerably lower than what has been stated by Green et al. (2013). The authors stress that bus travelling enhances opportunities to socially interact (hence with the assumption that it is something wished and valuable among older people), to participate in society, to encounter youths and to see how the world is changing. The data of this research support their argument that bus use plays an essential role in keeping older people engaged with society by enabling them to reach a variety of destinations (e.g., community centres, leisure centres, societies, supermarkets). However, it cannot entirely endorse Green et al.'s conclusions that the bus is a site of social engagement of particular importance for the elderly because of the intangible benefits that it might provide. Unlike their findings, all participants claimed that they do not get on a bus specifically to engage with strangers, either in active or passive ways (i.e., people-watching). On one hand, older people may feel more comfortable in the company of others when travelling on the bus and may enjoy their presence. However, on the other hand the respondents claimed that it is rare for them to start a conversation, and most times a direct engagement is discouraged and avoided. The findings of this study support the argument by Green et al. that older people enjoy watching the world go by and take pleasure in seeing life going on, yet this has not been observed specifically in relation to local bus use. In fact, as mentioned also in Chapter 4, bus travelling can be unpopular precisely *because* of other people's presence and behaviours:

> *Grace*: I enjoy train travel, I'm not thrilled about buses but I can disappear into my own little bubble with my kindle. (64, Brighton)

> *Alice*: A place that makes me feel anxious and angry is the bus. And this is why I use the car quite a lot. There is always somebody that is doing something that's annoying because they have no manners, right? (laughs). People who are really talking loudly, incessantly, on the phone, and younger women with their babies in the buggies are really aggressive! (71, Hackney)

> *Iris*: There are a lot of scruffy people on the bus who go from where I live, you know, people who don't speak English and swear a lot and I don't particularly want… that's snobbish, but I don't find them interesting (laughs), so I don't chat. Sometimes I do with older people who look like they have a problem in getting on and off the bus, but apart from that no. (79, Brighton)

Similar forms of sociability occur regularly in the public places of the city and most people's accounts describe situations that happen while queuing (e.g., at the bus stop, supermarket, post office, bank) and while walking on the streets (e.g., mistakenly knocking or being knocked by someone). These situations are characterised by the transient nature of the encounter that engages those involved just for a short period of time. However, other public places allow for more prolonged and possibly constructive interactions with the unacquainted. An example of this is the market. Markets are symbolic sites of public encounter which have been described by Watson (2006) as places that encourage social mixing and social inclusion. In particular, the author argues that some markets can play a crucial social role especially for older people. The majority of older people in the sample are not regular frequenters of markets though, particularly in Brighton & Hove where many participants lamented the lack of attractive and periodic markets in their local area, as Eve exemplifies:

> *Eve*: Because there is no market around here and you have to go all the way to Brighton, there is a fruit and vegetables market there. But it's an awful lot of hassle to get there. It's different if you live around the corner so you can go in, but you have to go all the way on the bus and so that's why we do our shopping at Sainsbury's. (67, Hove)

However, amongst those participants who visit markets a few talked about these sites as places where they enjoy browsing among the stalls, chatting with the traders and just being amongst other people. It appears that a visit to the market can be pleasant and energising because of the social exchanges, the lively atmosphere and the presence of pleasant things to see and smell. A market expedition is normally undertaken with shopping purposes but to some informants just wandering about can be very enjoyable:

> *Zoe*: I do like markets very much. I don't like so much the bustle... I like farmers' markets and I like nice fresh food. (…) The human beings in the supermarkets are not... they are just boring people, I'm sorry. But if you go to a market stall, they are more alive and you interact more with people, I interact on stalls more. (60, Hackney)
>
> *Charlotte*: I don't much enjoy grocery shopping, apart from the Saturday market. That is very lively and they have nice food, I like that kind of shopping, Broadway Market is a treat. (…) We would stay probably about an hour if we stop at a nice pub, so sometimes I leave my husband parked there and he'll have a drink and a newspaper while I'll do the shopping, or we'll both do shopping and have a drink after. (63, Hackney)
>
> *Luke*: On Saturday at Broadway Market we will do a list of cheeses and olives and bread and nice things that we want. My wife could do it alone but almost always I go with her because it's just a nice atmosphere. (62, Hackney)
>
> *Sophie*: Oh I love going to boot fairs, going hunting down treasures, bargains; I bought so many things at boot fairs. That's what I like to do on Saturday or Sunday, I love doing that at weekends. (80, Brighton)

In addition to markets, another public space that encourages spontaneous social interaction often of a positive nature is the park. Kazmierczak and James (2007) discussed the importance of green spaces as social arenas, in particular they highlighted the characteristic of parks as spaces where social contact can happen in an undemanding, modest and relaxed way. Most subjects described green areas as vital, wide parks in particular, and this is supported by the high frequency of visits to parks and allotments reported in the previous chapter. According to the participants, an added value of cities' green areas resides in their characteristic of being *urban*, as participants underlined that precisely because they live in a city they can appreciate parks more. Vice versa, they can appreciate the city more because of the opportunity to enjoy also beautiful natural landscapes at walking distance. Consequently, they do not think wistfully of the country and they are happy overall to live in an urban centre. This marks the crucial importance for planners and policymakers to invest in urban parks – particularly in their maintenance – so that the objective stated by Scharf et al. (2005) about

ensuring tolerable and enjoyable urban living to the elderly can be truly pursued (cf. p.138), with tangible benefits for all sectors of the population. Parks are spaces where the *bumpability* manifests easily; bumping into familiar strangers and acquaintances in the local green area or in a park that is visited regularly is common among the Hackney participants:

> *Nathan*: I think the walk in Parliament Hill I see it as a sort of exercise. I see another man and he does the same thing, he walks on his own as exercise, so sometimes I bump into him and we just have a laugh as we both know what we are doing. (68, Hackney)

> *Chloe*: Last time I was at the playground in the park with my daughter and there was a woman sitting there and she suddenly said to me "What is your granddaughter's name?" and I said "Eveline" and she said "Oh that's my daughter's name!" and then we started talking you know. It just happens naturally really. (66, Hackney)

> *Alice*: I go to the marshes on my own, and I meet a lot of people.
> *Chiara*: Are they friends?
> *Alice*: No, not friends… they sort of become friends. Some people you really get on with, like there are two Italian women that I really like that I meet there, they both have big dogs, and we talk, and I would invite them at home sometimes but I haven't done it yet… (71, Hackney)

We can see that Alice goes to the park to walk her dog. As stressed in a study by McNicholas and Collis (2000), "research has identified a role for pets, especially dogs, as catalysts for human-human interactions which, in turn, might promote a feeling of social integration" (p.2) and they find that casual conversations that occur when a dog is present last longer than when it is absent. In support to this, the qualitative data of this research show that casual social encounters occur spontaneously among those who walk dogs in parks as a regular activity. Among the participants from Hackney there are four dog-walkers, two of whom live on their own and the other two are married, hence it cannot be inferred any assumption about dog ownership as a possible way to prevent loneliness. In addition, a few more participants do not have dogs themselves but they do interact with dog-walkers regularly in their local parks, possibly because the degree to which a person is perceived as likeable may increase with the presence of a dog (McNicholas & Collis, 2000). The examples from Hackney suggest that dog-

walking is a way to increase the opportunities for a form of sociability that does not necessarily remain at the level of a fleeting encounter but can lead to more meaningful and long-term relationships and stronger social networks:

> *Ben*: I walk up now with the dog every day, and I see people, now that I am retired I get to see people and talk to them all the time. You would be amazed, having a dog it's quite an amazing thing, I know all the dog walkers around and sometimes we've got parties, and we had drinks in the pub, and we all know one another, yeah! I mean there's a few people I know just from walking the dog, it's a very sociable activity. (72, Hackney)

> *Mia*: One of the regular dog-walkers was a grumpy old boy and he died 18 months ago… My friend Louise, who's got a dog too, and I used to go up the hospital for him. (68, Hackney)

Brighton and Hove have more green areas than the London borough of Hackney. Despite this, those parks are slightly less frequented than the Hackney ones by the participants. In looking for a possible explanation, issues related to parks' distance from home and conditions (e.g., level of deprivation, decay and maintenance) should be considered, as the quote below seems to imply:

> *Grace*: I used to use this park a lot, it was a place to go, and now I go to another park because it's got trees, it's got flowers, greenery, and grass and you can sit and picnic… All these things you could do in this park in this city, and now I have to drive to the other park. (64, Brighton)

Different forms of sociability take place in the green areas of the two case study locations. Apart from a few exceptions, participants from Brighton & Hove did not talk about parks as places where they normally experience casual social interactions. There, the subjects associated parks mostly with physical exercise, principally walking, either alone or with friends. The only respondent in Brighton reporting to have a dog did not comment on the sociable dimension of walking by herself or with the dog in the green area near her residential premises. Instead, she focused on the physical aspect of it:

> *Rebecca*: This area is all very steep, and it's good for walking the dog and also good for walking myself and I can park very easily. (62, Brighton)

Another example is provided by the "Health Walks" organised by Brighton & Hove City Council and the NHS, which combine physical activity and sociability. Although the walks are free and open to anyone regardless of age, most attendees are over 50s to whom walks represent a good way to keep fit but also an opportunity to socialise. The four participants who join those walks – even though they join different ones – admitted that the highlight of a walk is the end, when the group sits in a pub for a coffee or a meal (see also p.117). Combining physical activity with time for meaningful social interactions is a form of sociability important to many older people both in Brighton & Hove and Hackney. As the significant amount of time spent by the subjects in doing physical exercise may suggest, it is becoming increasingly popular among local councils and leisure centres that offer activities to the over 50s to mix activity and socialisation and to provide facilities that enable meaningful sociability among members. Kirby (2008) argues that urban areas have often been associated with a variety of malaises, not least the scarce level of physical exercise caused by car-centred urban designs that discourage walking practises. This consideration implies that urban design plays a determinant role in encouraging or discouraging people to exercise. For this reason the design of the city has been considered as a pivotal factor in the increased rate of obesity especially in American conurbations (Semenza & March 2009; Vojnovic et al. 2006). Nevertheless, urban areas provide also the resources that satisfy the needs of those people who desire exercising and socialising. For older people in particular, Naaldenberg et al. (2012) argue that familiarity with places and proximity to facilities and people are important elements that enable older people to exercise and these also boost their perceived feeling of control and independence from other people. Also Michael et al.'s (2006) study on the ways in which neighbourhood design promotes active ageing finds that cities can be supportive environments for older people if a number of conditions are met. These conditions are the presence of local shops and services, adequate pedestrian infrastructure and low traffic, good public transport and presence of attractive features within the neighbourhood that encourage walking.

Despite the high level of urbanisation of Brighton & Hove and Hackney and despite the deprivation of specific areas, both localities offer the resources that support those older people who are willing to maintain physical and mental wellbeing. Mollenkopf et al. (2007) found that as people age they tend to engage less in outdoor activities. Although this is true for some of the 50 participants, the majority of subjects appear to engage in new outdoor activities or to undertake consolidate hobbies on a more frequent basis and this is enabled by the opportunities for leisure and recreational programmes available in the city. The subjects

keep busy with different hobbies with the purpose of adjusting to old age, i.e. gardening, singing lessons, Italian and French classes, art classes, IT and computing courses, creative writing, Scrabble, discussion groups, volunteering for local organisations and institutions. Sport-related activities are very popular among the respondents, i.e. biking, rowing, swimming, exercising at the gym, walking, pilates, yoga, Thai-Chi, dancing and a variety of light exercise classes. The analysis of the data shows that older people enjoy outdoor physical activity as well as indoor ones. Hence, providing easily reachable and well-maintained open spaces that can be used freely as sport grounds would encourage people of different age groups and social backgrounds to engage in a range of leisure activities. For example, while some people may be rowing in the river, some other would be running, walking or biking on the banks. Indeed, these are enjoyable ways of being amongst others and the mix of people may contribute to reduce individuals' feelings of insecurity. As a consequence, there are more chances to transform such a space into an arena for *inter*generational and *intra*generational encounters. The quotes below are taken from two participants who exercise outdoors and from these examples it can be noticed how physical activity is strongly linked to sociability, in particular to social relationships with other sport mates, and how this can significantly impact self-respect and dignity, especially in Megan's case:

> *Megan*: This is the river, one day I went on a bike because I was coaching somebody in the single (kayak) so I was standing here…
> *Chiara*: What is it that you enjoy?
> *Megan*: Being with other people, I mean I've probably met most of my friends through rowing. And being outdoors, I was outdoors this morning from 9:00 to 11:00 and I don't mind coming home now you know… And I have responsibility. I run a group, two groups, so it's quite good for me. And I just meet so many people! (…) And that's the café where I spend all my money! So we often go for a cup of tea after the rowing. These are the younger girls, I don't always row with them.
> *Chiara*: Do you like that place?
> *Megan*: Oh gosh, yes! Because it's the reward after the rowing, the tea and the bacon and the chips sometimes… And talking! There is a really nice atmosphere, most days we sit outside, today there were 16 of us there and there is everybody chatting away. And you know I talk to younger people which is good when you are old I have decided (…). You can't just mix with

over 60s… And they're lovely, you know, they are really supportive. I forget I am as old as I am really. I feel quite privileged. (64, Hackney)

Charlotte: I think this is Friday morning, this is Springfield Park. This is where I go on a Friday morning for the cycling. This is a nice thing that Hackney Council arranges for older people 50 plus, they arrange a lot of sport activities to encourage older people to get involved and stay healthy, and the one I signed up for was the mountain biking for an hour and a half, so we meet at a rowing club and we cycle different routes around the Hackney Marshes, it's very nice, it's lovely. (…) I have a cycling girl-friend, who I met at training three years ago for over 55, and in fact it was her who told me about this new cycling scheme and so I go out with her once a week or maybe twice… Well cycling is organised, but we meet there and have coffee, and we also go swimming. (63, Hackney)

Harriet: The week before we went to Thai-chi and it was such a lovely day that we sat outside (in a pub nearby) and had a coffee, it's lovely! (72, Hove)

Undertaking physical activities is important not only to support health, but because it assists older people in enlarging their social connections. Having the chance to share a common interest with younger adults and youths and being able to mix with them is important to Megan. The rationale behind her enthusiasm is that rowing contributes to define her social identity after retirement and it enables her to stay in contact with the world. Similarly, Charlotte started new friendships through cycling, which leads to increased levels of activity and sociability. Indeed, indoor and outdoor activities are equally important in enabling older people to make new friendships and stimulate their interest and curiosity towards new things, as Oliver's excerpt suggests:

Oliver: It's become more important to go out actually. I don't think I went out as much when I was working, I used to go to the sailing club more than I do now but I didn't investigate other things to go to. I think I probably look for more evening activities than I used to because I've got more time and keeping up the social contacts I think is psychologically good. (65, Brighton)

Alone together

By looking at the meanings that the research participants associate to the concept of *sociability*, the data suggest that social interactions not only occur in the form of verbal exchange or direct contact with people. It appears that social contact occurs also in the form of non-verbal interaction with society as many older people find it restorative to be alone in public places, especially in those places that allow them to linger and watch the world go by. A significant number of older people claim to enjoy visiting places on their own and this seems to be common among both men and women. Thus, it can be argued that solitude sometimes is the main reason to get outdoors rather than the opportunity for social contact, although being surrounded by things and people is the valuable part of the experience. Cattell et al. (2008) argue that there are places that offer older people an occasion for reflection, which is something valued by a significant number of research participants. The two excerpts below illustrate this general feeling quite well:

> *Charlie*: I like being near windmills, I know it sounds silly… So what I do is in the summer I try to book up, and there is a seat there and there is the sun, and I could sit there for hours and hours. (…) It's a nice place where I can just go and sit, I like it. And of course there's quite a lot of wildlife there, birds and foxes and stuff. (72, Hove)

> *Evan*: I mainly go to this café with a particular friend, but I'm just as happy on my own, because I find it's an antidote to feeling lonely. (...) Sometimes I feel a bit lonely if I am in the flat by myself, and that's a good way… I quite like just to keep a journal and see what's going on internally in my life, and so that's a nice atmosphere to do that, it's lovely. (...) Loneliness and being alone are two different things and I need to be alone to think things through. (85, Hackney)

As relevant examples of urban public and semi-public places this research considers cafés and natural environments (e.g., urban parks), because most participants mentioned these as the places where they would go to if they wanted to spend some time just thinking quietly on their own. With regard to cafés, Laurier and Philo (2006) significantly argue that these are places that allow people to be left alone with relative comfort, and "this quality of being left

alone by others even becomes part of the enjoyment of the presence of others" (p.204). Older people in the research group claimed that they generally take an item with them such as a book or a newspaper to prevent feeling awkward in being completely alone. This is due to the common assumption that cafés are places of conviviality, places where someone goes with a purpose such as eating or working or even to find a safe shelter in times of unpleasant weather. Therefore, the purpose of cafés is not immediately associated with reflection and solitude. Some participants stressed that the possibility of looking odd when sitting alone in a café can be more accentuated among older people if compared with younger generations. The reason for such statement is the belief that seeing an old person alone in a café would immediately lead other people to associate her to loneliness, which is an impression that people in general tend to discourage. Therefore, having something to read justifies the absence of company and makes the old person feel less uncomfortable. It could be argued that not only planners and policymakers should think of places that may forge conviviality and encounter (Fincher 2003), but that the solitary dimension of public places should be taken into greater account to design places where older people as well as anyone else could linger alone and yet enjoy being with others. Thus, it would be sensible to rethink or conceive suitable "places to be" (Holland et al. 2007, p.69), places in the city that allow people to linger and that can be accessed free – unlike cafés where consumption is mandatory. An example of this is provided by a Hackney participant who visits a public roof garden on a regular basis because she has been assigned a small space to grow plants and flowers. There is a café there but she is allowed to have her own kettle and teas and she enjoys being alone while being surrounded by other people with similar interests in gardening or greenery. If on one hand going alone to a café is a way to be connected to society and be part of it through passive interaction, on the other hand the fact of being in a café and reading something can also send the message to other people that the person wants to be left alone. For instance, sometimes Zoe goes for lunch in a café where she knows the owners, but she claimed that her visits are not related to the relationship with them:

> *Zoe*: They are friendly, but I'm not going there for friendliness. There is this recognition like I know who owns it and I feel a connection to it because I know the boy, but I don't want to sit and chat, I just want to go and read the paper, and they have free Guardian. (…) I won't go if they've got the same soup on the menu twice, then I would move on. (60, Hackney)

Zoe's words underline the argument that older people do not necessarily want to go out purposely to interact with the unacquainted or familiar strangers. In particular, as far as restaurants and cafés are concerned, the data gathered in both cities confirm that affordability and quality of food is a priority to the perceived friendliness of the place. Nevertheless, Zoe's decision to have a meal in a café suggests that she enjoys being outside and surrounded by different things and people, and this has a positive effect on her psychological wellbeing. Being out of the home among others is also a way to avoid isolation, as Grace recognises:

> *Grace*: I could walk out (of my house) and sit in one of those cafés if I wanted to, even if I took my Telegraph. But I will do that, I might go and sit in the pub even on my own or one of the cafés, for half an hour, and take my crossword with me, perhaps even with my I-pod... It's not that I'm necessarily looking to be with other people to talk to but just not to be within these four walls. And it's important that one does that. (64, Brighton)

A similar phenomenon happens with regard to parks and natural environments. Although it has been stressed that a causal connection between urban greenery and health is difficult to identify scientifically (Lee & Maheswaran 2011), there is a general consensus among environmental psychologists that green areas have a positive impact on people's psychological and physical wellbeing and that the activities undertaken by older people in green areas (e.g., walking in parks or gardening at a community allotment) are a way to achieve the goals of healthy ageing (Hartig et al. 2003; Maas et al. 2009; Maas et al. 2006; Milligan et al. 2004; Twiss et al. 2003; van den Berg et al. 2003; Velarde et al. 2007). Cities' green areas provide unique and free opportunities to anyone who wishes to temporarily isolate themselves from the concrete and noise of the urban fabric, and Chapter 4 showed that parks and community allotments are one of the most frequent destinations both in Hackney and Brighton & Hove. The subjects expressed a preference to visit parks with friends or relatives rather than on their own. To some participants this is a pleasant way to spend some quality time with their closest social contacts, whereas to others it relates again to the impression that an old person walking alone in a park may give to other people. The following excerpt is taken from Evan, who does not feel comfortable in going to the park on his own:

> *Evan*: I don't particularly like going out on a Sunday afternoon in the park, it's about seeing lots of couples and people together, and I might be on my own. I'm not always on my own obviously, I meet people around the park,

> but if I were on my own I wouldn't go for that reason. And I've heard a lot of other people have expressed this, it's not just a matter of age… just feeling the odd one out. (85, Hackney)

However, the same participant enjoys spending time alone in a café and this may be due to the fact that a higher number of people are to be seen on their own in cafés making the solitary experience less out of the ordinary and therefore less uncomfortable. Nevertheless, there are subjects who enjoy solitude in natural spaces, especially at times when not many people are around and provided that they are familiar with the environment and they feel safe, because safety is certainly a prerequisite to enjoy solitude in open spaces. Interestingly, only a few people in Brighton go to the seafront either alone or with company and they claim to go quite regularly especially early in the morning or late in the evening when nearly nobody is around and the atmosphere is perceived as more special. Contemplation, reflection, reading and exercising are the reasons provided by the research subjects who do visit natural environments on their own. Often, being alone adds uniqueness to the situation and makes the environment even more special, as the quotes below reveal:

> *Alexander*: Sometimes I come and walk around at night if I don't have the chance to exercise during the day so it's quiet and you can see foxes around. (63, Hackney)

> *Alex*: I'd go for the day on my own. There's no buildings at all there, I would sit there for the day and look with my binoculars, recharge my spiritual batteries and come home! (71, Hove)

Crowds and empty spaces – Perception of safety in the city

This section considers the interplay between urban features and personal perception of safety in old age. In so doing, it relates it to sociability by exploring the ways in which the presence and the absence of strangers in public places may affect older people's outings. The last paragraph of the previous section briefly introduces how the perceived level of safety of an area in terms of crime and traffic affects older people's likelihood of frequenting a variety of urban places. Go-alongs and interviews prompted participants to talk about personal safety as they navigate the public realm. The variety of accounts provided by the subjects support Pain's (2000) consideration of fear of crime as:

> "a phenomenon which varies between individuals; which has geographical, economic, social, cultural and psychological dimensions; which is influenced by a whole range of processes and relations scaled from the global, national and local to the household and the body; and which is rooted in place and variable between places." (p.381)

Pain's definition can be applied more broadly to include other causes of anxiety besides fear of crime that can be experienced in public places and that emerged in this research. Rather unexpectedly, men and women overall feel equally insecure in going out, and the most common worrying situations are represented by dark spaces, narrow alleyways and empty parks. However, parks with groups of youngsters and crowds of people on the streets were also reported as sources of anxiety. In addition, the data show that two men claimed to be more apprehensive about road traffic than they used to be (whereas no woman did), and one man and one woman reported being afraid of dogs in green areas. Thus, one consideration that emerges from the analysis of the data is that, in contrast to general opinion, gender differences lessen when it comes to perception of safety outdoors. Although research demonstrates how men's vulnerability outdoors is as frequent as women's, in the common perception fear is usually a gendered quality associated to women (Pain 2001). There is evidence that when middle age men are asked about fear of crime in surveys they avoid giving answers that might question their masculinity, and the reasons might stem from the societal stereotypisation of the man as invulnerable (Pain, 2001). Yet, qualitative research reports feelings of insecurity among males, as Goodey (1997) noticed that young boys admit to experience fear but this open admission becomes less frequent with the passage to adulthood.

Therefore, it is worth exploring what happens when men reach their 60s. With this research, common assumptions about gender and fear of crime in the public realm are challenged, as on one hand several women's accounts of their outdoor experiences portray them as fearless (see Gilchrist et al., 1998), whereas several men did not hesitate to express their feelings of insecurity when they navigate public spaces especially at night. For instance, Alexander enjoys going to a particular park at night where he feels safe (p.151), however he also talked about another park in Hackney in which he does not feel safe. Like him, other male participants expressed insecurity with regard to parks and also to other public spaces at certain times of the day, as George's and Oliver's quotes below demonstrate:

> *Alexander*: I don't walk across that park at night, because it's dangerous. People can hide in the park, even though there is an illuminated path. So I never go into it, I always walk around it, even if there are paths with street lights. You can see I'm walking the side (by looking at GPS track logs). (63, Hackney)

> *George*: The Meeting Place where we used to meet in London Road, which is a much more rundown area, was in a little side street and there were lots of drugs around and it was a very unpleasant place. There I felt a bit vulnerable, I was glad to get on the bus you know when the bus came, but of course you had to wait for the bus just in the middle of it. Sometimes I think if somebody attacked me I couldn't defend myself, or if somebody got attacked I couldn't really do much about it. (74, Hove)

> *Oliver*: (I feel uncomfortable) somewhere where is very crowded (...). Saturday nights in Brighton there is a lot of drunken people about. You're always slightly aware that if people are very drunk it might be a good idea to kind of keep from looking at them and avoid walking straight into them because you never know what they could do. Nights and weekends it can be slightly intimidating sometimes. (65, Brighton)

This is not to claim that all male subjects feel insecure at certain times and in particular places, as there are numerous males whose accounts are not dominated by apprehension. However, the number of men expressing feelings of fear is representative of a general less masculine approach to danger. On the other hand, Zoe's words below relate to what was

previously described as "fearless women", which does not indicate someone who naively overlooks the possibility of danger but rather someone who adopts a positive attitude to seemingly unsafe environments and who does not let insecurity restrict her movements:

> *Zoe*: There is an alleyway that is dark, dank and shady, but it's very atmospheric, it's very Dickensian and I love that because it takes me back in time to a different era of London which I like, but of course I wouldn't like to be there at night on my own. You could get mugged, because it's a rough area, and it's like there are tramps sleeping in there… It's rough, it's a part of the East End of London that hasn't been touched really, they are not tourists' spots you know. This area has not been gentrified and I like it but I am nervous of it at the same time. I want it to stay like that, because it's got atmosphere, it's got graffiti on the walls, things like that. It's very atmospheric, very authentic, very evocative place. (60, Hackney)

Alexander's and Zoe's comments on a park and an alleyway respectively are representative of other individuals' feelings towards different environments in the city. They are somehow in contrast to the finding stressed in environmental psychology that walking in natural environments leads to an increase in positive affect and a reduction in stress and anger whereas walking in urban environments leads to opposite psychological reactions (Hartig et al. 2003). Alexander's and Zoe's statements challenge also a study that focuses specifically on the advantages of natural environments on older people, and which looks in particular at the health benefits of gardening activities in later life (Milligan et al. 2004). The authors find that older people experience natural and built landscapes in a contrasting way:

> "In contrast (to the natural environment), many urban settings are deficient in restorative features. The positive association between natural landscape and mental well being, as expressed by our participants, contrasted sharply with responses to the built urban and often deprived localities in which they were resident. In particular, they noted the negative effect on older people's sense of well being and safety of neighborhoods where rubbish, graffiti and youth crime were the norm." (p.1786)

Andrew and Phillips (2005) claim that the concept of *therapeutic landscapes* identifies places that are normally associated with health, wellbeing and healthy ageing, and that it may be

increasingly used to examine ageing and place. Although there is no doubt of the beneficial outcomes of gardening, the therapeutic values of natural landscapes such as relaxation and invigoration cannot be generalised to this research because people's reactions to natural environments in urban areas are nuanced and varied. The example of Alexander shows that some urban parks can be source of apprehension, in particular at certain times. The fact that Alexander may go out for a walk at night in another local park (p.151) entails that some features of a park can be worrisome (e.g., spots where people could hide, narrow paths), while others may not provoke similar feelings of insecurity. On the other hand, although Zoe's example could be read as an extreme, it nonetheless highlights the therapeutic value of the urban environment, which can impact older people's wellbeing by arousing excitement and pleasure. Even more, it suggests that the therapeutic outcomes can manifest even in particularly deprived areas normally associated with crime, vandalism and urban decay. Research has linked safety in the built environment to increased mobility for older people and in particular the decay of the architectural landscape has been found to reduce people's sense of security, hence personal mobility (Michael et al. 2006; Yen et al. 2014). Graffiti are usually included among the negative elements (Michael et al. 2006), however in Zoe's case they appear as a positive feature and do not hinder her mobility practices, if anything they encourage them. By being an exception, Zoe's example is significant because it highlights the nuances that characterise older people's perceptions of the urban environment with regard to positive or negative features that supposedly lead to personal security or insecurity.

Among the participants who talked about safety, 7 men and 7 women recognised that in different circumstances they feel worried or apprehensive outdoors whereas 10 men and 13 women claimed that they normally feel confident and safe. Regardless of age, anyone during the life course experiences feelings of safety as well as vulnerability in a dynamic process that changes according to space, time, and other contextual variables. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, numerous factors determine the wide spectrum of people's emotional reactions to urban environments, such as familiarity with the area, the presence or absence of people nearby, age differences, years spent in the area, previous experiences of victimisation, health conditions, societal images of the area and discourses about youth. It might be argued that a few years after retirement men enter a different social identity that is generally less associated with virility or powerful masculinity and this reduces pervasive social pressures to adhere to dominant images of maleness. Indeed this is a complex issue, as the new identity of "retired man" may create a whole new set of societal expectations that

depicts older people as frail and victimised (Rozario & Derienzis 2009). Seen through this lens, an old man's open admission of vulnerability in public spaces at night might be the new response to another stereotype. This stereotype has been challenged at least on two fronts: on one hand, evidence demonstrates how older people are neither more nor less fearful than anyone else (Pain, 2001). On the other hand, a strand of policy discourse promotes a contrasting view of older people as physically and socially active citizens, generally referred to as *healthy ageing*, *active ageing*, *positive ageing* or *successful ageing* to indicate older people's opportunities to be independent and confident in their day-to-day activities (Naaldenberg et al. 2012; World Health Organization 2002). With regard to safety issues, however, the latter conceptualisation of old age does not emerge as the dominant narrative in the qualitative data gathered for the research. In other words, the *active ageing* rhetoric does not influence people's attitudes or perceptions to a great extent and participants refer to it only in relation to health issues (e.g., the importance to keep fit and healthy). Despite the abovementioned evidence and ideologies question the stereotyping of old age as a time of frailty and victimisation, such stigmatisation still influences general opinion and some policy discourses (Delmar-Morgan 2013; McVeigh 2007; National Institute of Aging 2013). Several men and women in the research group tend to align with the diffuse image of the frail old person even if they do not feel in danger when they are out and about. Some participants who claimed that they might go out at night, even those without any safety concerns, said that going out after dark is not a sensible thing to do for an old person, questioning their own legitimate feeling of safety rather than the general assumption that old people should not go out too late because it would not be safe and they would not be able to cope with sudden acts of violence. This relates to a tendency among the general public and among some gerontological research to consider urban environments as intimidating for older people, a tendency that shapes general perception and often leads to withdrawal and disengagement from public life (Phillipson & Scharf 2005).

Depending on the specific social and environmental contexts of a city, the level of insecurity and fear perceived by an individual may vary. The analysis of the qualitative data shows a clear prevalence of narratives about safety among the Hackney residents compared to those of Brighton & Hove. In the latter city, accounts are mostly concerned with a specific area of Brighton that has recently become a gathering place for younger people at night with several pubs and clubs, and the unpleasant atmosphere means that older people feel unsafe and prefer not to access the area in the evening (see Oliver's excerpt, p.154). Apart from this

particular area, older people's accounts are less focused on safety issues, whereas in Hackney the general perception of the borough as a combination of more and less deprived areas affects the image that some older people have of certain zones. This image combined with societal stereotypes about the elderly as frail and vulnerable often translates into older people's belief that a reasonable old person should not be going out alone in the dark. However, this does not necessarily entail actual withdrawal from the public arena, as people may challenge these assumptions and access outdoor places despite common sense advising the opposite:

> *Freddie*: As I got older I started thinking you shouldn't be going out especially at night time, because 30 years ago there was a lot of chaos but it wasn't as bad as it is today, nowadays you could lose your legs for nothing, you could lose your legs just for bumping in the street into somebody "Oh I apologise sorry" but then they would take revenge, it could be a knife it could be a gun… But I still feel pretty comfortable. (63, Hackney)

> *Evan*: There was one incident seven or eight years ago, I came out quite late one night about 1:00 o'clock and a couple of guys were making remarks like "Come here we want you" and it was quite scary, but they didn't do anything. That was scary, but it was a bit silly to go out that late. (85, Hackney)

Hence, there are people who feel safe while wandering in the public realm but in some circumstances they may consider their confidence as inappropriate. However, there are also those who declared to feel safe whenever they are out whereas in actual fact they are comfortable only because they avoid going out where and when they would not feel safe, unconsciously adopting what has been described as "precautionary behaviour" (Pain 2001, p.902), as it is suggested by the following two examples:

> *Chiara*: Do you feel safe in going out in the evening?
> *Alex*: In Brighton yes! I'm not so sure about parts of London, but in Brighton yeees. I go to bed early, I'm a boring old man, and I get up at 5:00 am, so... you know. (71, Brighton)

> *Chiara*: Are there situations that make you feel uncomfortable?
> *Stanley*: No. I don't go out clubbing or drinking later at night in Brighton because it's very uncongenial. So no, all these places I go to I feel quite comfortable. (81, Brighton)

This attitude may not necessarily lead to drastic shrinking of older people's horizons, but at times it can prevent them from going outdoors or from doing the things they want to when they want to. For instance, Amber claimed to feel rather safe in going anywhere in London and she enjoys doing cultural activities. However, she hesitated when asked about evening outings to the theatre or the cinema and she did not seem so confident:

> *Amber*: Now I don't like going out in the evening, so if I go to the theatre is usually a matinee, which sometimes restricts you a bit you know to be able to get seats and all that. (79, Hackney)

The same is true for Eve in Hove, who is always out and about during the day but she does not venture out at night in the Brighton clubbing area that was mentioned above. Nonetheless, at times she cannot avoid passing through the area because she is involved in a choir that regularly meets there, and her words suggest that the perceived insecurity of the area is minimised by the presence of other people and this encourages her regular undertaking of social activities:

> *Eve*: I think late at night I'd be (uncomfortable), where all the clubs are on the seafront, you wouldn't go on your own. I mean… I've done it because I sing in the church which is there, but not during the night unless it's Christmas or some midnight mass going on. But usually I get a lift from other people… I don't mind walking at 9:00 pm because there are so many people that are just out, not drunk yet, so if it's early is fine, but if it was 2:00 am then I'd think "perhaps not!". (67, Hove)

There is ambivalence with regard to the presence of other people and its effect on older people's perception of safety. Other people in public spaces can be perceived as threatening, or they can reassure and boost older people's confidence in getting about depending on those people's appearance, as it is confirmed also by other studies (e.g., Föbker & Grotz 2006). The presence of "respectable" strangers who do not fall into the category of "dangerous people" (who, drawing from most respondents' accounts, are often represented by young people from

ethnic minorities) is perceived as a guarantee that if anything would happen there would be witnesses that may intervene and help, and it would also put off delinquents in the first place:

> *Charlotte*: There has been quite an influx of young professionals in this part of Hackney, so now when you get off the train maybe at 10:30 at night, there are six or seven people coming with you, whereas it used to feel you were just the only one who was setting out at night. (...) It makes me feel more confident (seeing people around), just that there is life, and people you could shout at if you wanted help. (63, Hackney)

This research supports Pain's (2000) claim that fear in public spaces cannot be "designed out" with ad hoc urban planning (cf. Newman, 1972) and it is argued that, as far as personal perception of safety is concerned, social activities and interactions shape the environment rather than the other way around, both in negative and positive ways (e.g. "respectable strangers" can change the perception older people have of a park). Interactions intended as exchange of words or physical contacts do not necessarily occur, but even mere co-presence can deeply affect people's perceptions. In local areas such as city neighbourhoods, perception of safety in public spaces closely relates to levels of familiarity with the environment. Familiarity though is not just about knowing the area and being confident in finding your ways around, but it is also linked to the recognition of "familiar strangers" (Paulos & Goodman 2004). As one male resident of Hackney put it:

> *Nathan*: I do feel quite confident, all the buses and the trains, I feel quite secure. And another thing here is that next to the newsagent is a taxi place and there is always a group of men sitting out there to whom you can say hello to. We used them once or twice, but it's just nice to know they are there, because again if you walk down that road at night you've got this group of people, they are Turkish and we know them. (68, Hackney)

Thus, to some people greeting each other and tacitly recognising their respective presence in the area may be enough to feel that they "know" those strangers who are regularly present and visible in the neighbourhood, although they do not engage in verbal interaction. Recognition works for both parts involved, and for a man from the Caribbean community the fact that people know him in Ridley Road market in Hackney makes him confident enough to walk about safely despite the reputation of the place as exposed to presence of pickpockets

and petty crimes. In this case, however, it is not only a matter of being recognised. Given that the Afro-Caribbean residents are the most numerous and thus visible frequenters of the market, there is also an ethnic component that nourishes his sense of belonging to the community and the consequent minor expectation of being prone to victimisation:

> *Martin*: If I come to the market on a Saturday I don't go among crowds, because there were times when you had groups from outside of the borough that will come to Hackney… But now the security is tight because here people used to be pick pocketed, they would target foreigners, they would know me as I come to the market every week, but like you or any other person they would target. So be aware. You are safe with me, but… (72, Hackney)

Arguably, the sense of belonging to a place and community – what Rowles defined as "place attachment" (1990) – might lead "to a more stable, long-term living population that cares more about their place of living than can be expected from 'a city of strangers and individualism'" (Pl⊘ger 2006, p.209). Although people's sense of belonging is unlikely to result from urban planning, there are factors that can nourish it. Research finds a relationship between residential stability and sense of belonging to a community or neighbourhood (Young et al. 2004), which is observed in this study as well. To consider the example above, Martin – the Afro-Caribbean subject – has been living in Hackney and at the same address for 28 years, a period of time that has encouraged the development of a strong attachment to the area. The majority of participants have spent between 31 and 58 years in the same area and some of them claimed to belong to it. However, place attachment does not appear as a recurrent issue during the interviews and many participants claimed that they have not developed a particularly strong attachment to the area or the city. They might like the city and the area but this does not automatically translate into belonging or the feeling of being part of a community. This is because the sense of belonging does not stem from residential stability exclusively, but other elements play a significant role too. For example, involvement in community activities, social networks, presence of amenities and services, individuals' health conditions and consequent possibilities to avail themselves of facilities and social connections, quality of housing and liveability of the area. With regard to the influence of perception of safety on individuals' sense of belonging, the data of this study suggest that sense of belonging is not always positively related to the perceived safety of the area. Perceiving the area as safe

might encourage a person's feeling of attachment to the area, like it is found by Young et al. (2004) in a large-scale study on Australian old women. However, in this study it appears that older people can feel a strong sense of belonging also when expressing discomfort in relation to the insecurity of the area. For instance, Charlie is a 72 years old man who has spent all his life in Hove and the last 20 years at the same address in the West of Hove. Like Martin above, he manifests a strong sense of attachment to the area thanks to residential stability and good health that enable him to go out for everyday purposes and leisure. Nevertheless, despite his strong attachment to Hove he does not consider the area as completely safe:

> *Charlie*: Oh yeah yeah, I feel safe, I mean during the day time… It's only in the evening that you keep away from certain places which you know there could be a possibility of a bit of trouble. (72, Hove)

Vice versa, there are areas perceived as safe for which older people may not develop a sense of attachment. For instance, Hannah has been living in the centre of Hove for 30 years, where she faces one of the most attractive squares near the sea and of which she is very proud. She feels safe in going out and about, but despite the number of years and the safety of the local surroundings she has not developed a significant sense of belonging to the area:

> *Hannah*: I'm very happy of Brighton & Hove, but I know the climate would suit me better (in Marseilles, where she spent some time in her youth), and the fact that I have friends there and that I can speak the language makes me feel like I could have a life there you know. (…) I'm not going to live there because my family is here, you know I wouldn't have a relationship with my grandchildren… (72, Hove)

In light of these considerations, this study questions the idea that an urban area that is perceived as safe by the residents might contribute to nourish thriving communities, enhanced sociability among residents and increased sense of attachment, as opposed to unsafe areas that might instead discourage sense of community and belonging. That may be a simplifying view that tends to overlook the relevant role of people's personal factors in influencing individuals' perceptions of the local environment.

Ageist stereotypes – other forms of interaction

The analysis of the qualitative data shows that social interactions in public places can occur also in the form of ageist attitudes. This section addresses the second research question by investigating how societal messages about old age are actually experienced by the subjects. A considerable number of authors have explored the societal preconceptions towards older people as well as older people's perceptions of ageist behaviours (Biggs 2005; Cook et al. 2007; Day & Hitchings 2011; Hagestad & Uhlenberg 2005; Hurd 1999; Jones 2006; McHugh 2000; Milligan et al. 2005; Rozario & Derienzis 2009; Scharf et al. 2005; Townsend et al. 2006). A variety of stigmas are associated with the status of *being old*, such as "infirmity, dependence, old fashioned attitudes and tastes, mental and physical slowness" (Day & Hitchings 2011, p.886) as well as repugnance for the ageing body (Biggs 2005). Societal preconceptions and expectations about how older people should behave in public spaces can induce an old person to embody those stereotypes and act in accordance to them (Findlay & McLaughlin 2005). Related to this, an issue that emerges from the semi-structured interviews is that a few participants play the role of the *old person* in some specific situations, meaning that they act out societal preconceptions about how older people might behave in public and about what society considers acceptable from an old person. In so doing, rather than distancing themselves from the label of "old person", they embody it to their own advantage. This is an issue that Porter (2000) underlines in relation to people with disabilities and that it is found reflected in older people's discourses. Respondents commented about playing the role of the frail and confused older person, and they appeared to adopt such attitude because of the effectiveness in achieving an objective rather than out of self-pity. However, in contrast to Porter's findings, older people's comments do not suggest that they want to "play the role" in any circumstance or regularly:

> *Lucy*: I remember – and I hate that thought – I was in Vietnam and at the end of the holiday I checked with the hotel and asked them to arrange my taxi to the airport, so I thought it would be safe. I got down waiting and the driver was late and I thought "Oh what's going on?" you know you don't want to be seen making a big fuzz – I think I was about 60 then – and I went to the reception and said "My driver hasn't turned up" and then "*And* I am *alone* and I'm an *older lady*, can you help me?". There was another woman of

> my age and she said "You can't pull that trick!" and I said "Yes I can when I need!" (laughs). So you have to do it when you want to be safe you know, but generally you don't want to hear it. (67, Brighton)
>
> *Stanley*: There are times when I find it helpful to pretend to be old and not very smart. I'll give you a classic one, I have a bus pass, so if I go to London I can use my bus pass on the buses but I cannot use the bus pass on the tube, so when I go to London if I'm going to go into the tube I know that if I put my pass into the barriers that won't work, but at the end of the barriers generally there is a man there, so generally I would pretend that I would keep trying this thing and eventually I get to the end and say "I can't make this work" and he says "Oh come on go on" and he opens for me! (81, Brighton)
>
> *Iris*: When I got back from the airport I had two suitcases and I had to get them over the railway line, and I was exhausted by then, and there were two young men standing outside the pub having a drink and I thought... you know, I just went to them just pretending I had no idea and I said "Can you tell me how I can get across the railway line without going up the stairs?" and they looked at me and said "Madam, it's not possible, what's the problem?", and I said "Well this luggage is the problem" and they took them all the way home for me, so it was fantastic. I find that if you talk to people, people are very nice – but you mustn't be aggressive, you've got to be pleasant. (79, Brighton)

This attitude is not representative of the majority of the participants as only six people talked in these terms. Yet, it may be adopted by a larger number of older people unconsciously or, as Lucy's comments "I hate that thought" and "you have to do it when you want to be safe" suggest, it may be accompanied by a slight sense of embarrassment, which may prevent them from disclosing it to others.

To some older people, the alignment to ageist stereotypes leads them to consider other people's annoyance towards the elderly in public places as justifiable, reinforcing entrenched preconceptions about being old. For example, Grace tends to distance herself from the group

of "older people", and when asked about other people's attitudes towards older people she thought of her mother and argued that:

> *Grace*: Old people can be irritating… You are in a hurry, in a rush to get to work or whatever you are doing, and this old lady is taking forever… It can be irritating, but that lack of respect for older people I think is a sad part of where our society is gone. (64, Brighton)

Gerontologists have long noticed that the social connotations of old age normally relate to negative characteristics and this spurs older people to avoid identifying themselves as old, hence unconsciously internalising ageist attitudes (Jones 2006). Grace's statement highlights this tendency as she does not consider herself as an old person, and this is facilitated by the opportunity to attribute the negative aspects of old age to another older person close to her, i.e. her mother.

In the excerpt that follows, Matilda reported a specific anecdote that occurred in a pub in Hackney and her reception of societal stereotypes is felt even more strongly. She not only acknowledges herself as old and recognises that older people can be perceived by others as a nuisance, but also she embodies negative social images of old age by declaring to be annoyed by her own and other older people's physical and mental slowness, characteristics often associated to old age. In so doing, she appears to conceive older people as an indistinct group of society mostly defined by undesirable qualities that separate it from the rest of the population and to which she would rather not belong or be associated with:

> *Chiara*: Do you find that people at the pub get annoyed with older people?
> *Matilda*: Oh he was getting annoyed, yes. Understandably sometimes, because we do get slow as we get older, we can't always see...
> *Chiara*: Why do you say "understandably"?
> *Matilda*: Because *I* get annoyed with old people, I don't like old people. I have to say it! I do not like old people, and I do not like being with old people.
> *Chiara*: Do you feel old?
> *Matilda*: Yes! And I hate it, I absolutely hate it. (76, Hackney)

In a project on age-friendly cities in London, Biggs and Tinker (2007) find that older people consider ageism as endemic and institutionalised. Notwithstanding the reality of ageist

attitudes across sectors of the population, the qualitative data gathered for this research does not support such argument. In fact, a significant number of participants do not feel discriminated against subject to ageist behaviours. This happens in particular to those whose attitude is friendly and sociable, which encourages opposition to ageist stereotypes and influences in positive ways their perceptions of what others might think about older people in general. Those people may be aware of the pervasiveness of ageism at micro and macro levels of society but they react to societal expectations with indifference, distance and serenity. This reflects what Zimmermann and Grebe (2014) have recently defined as *senior coolness*, described as "a form of resistance adopted by old people to reject stereotypical views of age and ageing" and "to assert their independence and uniqueness" (Zimmermann & Grebe 2014, p.27). The resistance occurs on the three levels of body, soul and mind, to which three qualities pertaining to the resisting subject are ascribed, i.e. respectively indifference, reserve and intellectuality (Simmel 1950; Zimmermann & Grebe 2014). Moreover, having a positive attitude and being indifferent to stereotypical societal discourses about old age can help older people maintain self-esteem and control in everyday life, naturally reducing the potential to feel subjected to ageist behaviours (Gunnarsson 2009, p.41). For instance, many interviewees with a positive self-assessed attitude to life and to other people claimed that they do not feel treated differently when they are served by a member of staff in a public place and they do not consider staff's potentially annoyed attitude as being age-related. The quotes below report some of the answers to the question "Do you think that people's attitude at shops or other public places is different to you, and if so, do you think it is because of your age?". The answers are representative of this feeling, which is shared by the majority of the research subjects in both cities and that can be interpreted as a confident reaction to distance themselves from socially accepted stigmas of older people:

> *Jacob*: No, I never thought of that as an age thing. I thought just being friendly, if you are friendly with people I think they respond. I never thought of it as an age thing, I've never had that. I think it's the way you react to people, if you are polite to them… That's my philosophy of life. (90, Hove)

> *Benjamin*: I don't think staff takes into consideration people's age, not around here at least. That's not my experience. I think we are treated all the same. I went into a chemist yesterday and in front of me I had somebody

> who looked like a drunk and the person behind the counter – quite understandably – reacted completely different as she did to me. He was saying "Where is this?" and she said "I cannot leave my till, it's over there", and as soon as I came along I said "I want this and that" and she said "Oh yes come with me!" (laughs). And that wasn't a matter of age, it was a matter of class or economic power or is this person going to cause trouble. (...) To be honest I don't see age as something that people react to. (65, Hackney)

> *Megan*: No, no, no, no. It's so mixed around here, it's multicultural, multi-age, all sorts of… No, I've never found anyone treating me like if I was old. (64, Hackney)

These excerpts introduce interesting considerations about tolerance and acceptance of "the other" in cosmopolitan urban environments, as cities may not exclusively reinforce prejudice and suspect but could also challenge indifference and discrimination (Valentine 2008; Young 1990). The quotes suggest that variety in terms of age, ethnic background, sexual orientation and so on, is an appreciated aspect of urbanity among participants. It relates to the point made by Phillipson and Scharf (2005) that gerontologists should overcome the diffused anti-urbanism underlying most research, to acknowledge instead the advantageous aspects of urban environments in the everyday life of older people. As mentioned already, the vast majority of research subjects are happy to live in a city and do not dream of moving to smaller towns or to the country. This leads us to conclude that overall the two cities meet the physical and psychological needs of those older residents who are independent, mobile and capable of getting out and about for a variety of purposes.

Nevertheless, there are indeed subjects who reported having experienced ageist attitudes in public places in the form of verbal and nonverbal behaviours, although they do not represent the majority of participants. Ageist attitudes can be negative but also positive because they are not only manifested through negative manners but can be perpetuated by excessive concern that can lead to patronisation, as Nathan's comment shows:

> *Nathan*: What I think it's awful it's this kind of treatment of the old people which is "Oh these are old people we must be kind to them", nobody has tried that on me in part because I get quite aggressive quite quickly because I just don't like it but if they do I can't stand it. I think this is part of a

> horrible culture where you categorise people as old and then you put them down somewhere and then you have crossed them off and you can carry on with your life and you reconcile with yourself "Oh I was very kind to them"… No, they don't want you to be *kind to them*, they want you to be *one of them*! It's terrible, it's kind of patronising. (68, Hackney)

No in-depth research has yet explored the attitudes towards older people in those places where interactions for services or commercial transactions take place. This would shed light on members of staff's feelings, thoughts and approaches whenever they deal with an old customer, and that combined with the analysis of older people's reactions may be at the forefront of future policies such as employees' trainings and codes of conduct. Given that the predominant rhetoric of most businesses is to "treat the customer as the king" and since older people represent a significant proportion of consumers (which might be expected to increase even more in the near future), a realistic marketing target may well be the understanding of what kind of approaches towards the older consumers are more effective. As the examples below demonstrate, members of the public trying to be nice and showing respect to an old person may end up obtaining the opposite result without realising it:

> *Alex*: I have noticed that if I go into a shop or on the bus they say to me "Good morning *young man*", and they're not being rude, yet it's an acknowledgment of my age. And I laugh, because if you are a young man they would never say "young man". (...) If you go up to the bar (in a pub) they are kind of over-considerate, they speak louder and they assume you're deaf: "Can I help you? Shall I bring it to you?", too caring, they think you're made of bone china. (71, Brighton)

> *Evan*: There are few people who – not deliberately but nevertheless *are* – kind of ageist. Ageism can come in all sorts of ways you know, and they would sort of go on "Oh you're wonderful for your age" and go on and on and on. (85, Hackney)

This ambivalent situation (thoughtfulness *vs* ageism) may be confusing for both parts involved, as some of those participants who feel patronised claim to feel unsure about how to respond to redundant acts of kindness because they would not want to react in a rude way to somebody else's good intentions. The common reactions are either to make a harmless and

fun remark about the inappropriateness of the comment or gesture, or to pretend not to be annoyed so that the other person would not feel uncomfortable, e.g. as many older women and men often do when they are offered a seat on the bus. Therefore, problematic tangles of emotions and expectations are involved even in such trivial social interactions, and this is due to "a tension between socially prescribed emotions of ageing and private subjective feelings" (Hepworth 1998, p.175). To tackle this aspect of ageism, more research is needed if businesses do not wish to lose their older customers and if policymakers want to foster convivial urban living and promote cities that are truly older people-friendly.

A last finding in relation to ageist behaviours and urban living is that ten women in the research group claimed to feel invisible in public spaces, an issue that emerges also in Mansvelt's (2008) study on ageing in urban areas and it is part of a broader inclination to ignore older women culturally, socially and economically (Poole & Feldman 1999). These women find it disrespectful and humiliating to be treated as if they did not exist in public, and they relate their invisibility to the status of being old, particularly of being an old woman. Biggs (2004) claims that invisibility for old women encompasses two absences, i.e. the absence of youth with all the related desirable qualities and the absence of maleness. This means that a woman passes from being too visible in her younger years to being invisible in later years, because the attention of a society centred on masculinity and youth denies her presence (Biggs 2004, p.49). Through both Matilda's and Hannah's words below we can understand how the double absence translates into the reality of old women's public lives:

> *Matilda*: Some people can be very very unpleasant to you, because they ignore you. You might just not be there, you feel invisible. I react with fury! (laughs) I don't say anything, but I do feel as an old woman – because if I was a man it would be different. (…) "Excuse me! Am I invisible then?" and he said "Oh sorry, oh sorry love, I didn't see you", how could you not see me?! And I got very angry. Then you feel silly about being angry somehow, people don't take you seriously. And… when I thought about it… he didn't see me. He just did not see me. (76, Hackney)

With her reaction driven by fury and anger, Matilda challenges such ageist attitudes and opposes strong resistance. It is recognised even by male participants that height, posture, and colour of the hair can deeply change people's perceptions of the old person who is standing in front of them and consequently their attitudes. In many participants' opinion, being short,

female and with grey hair increases the chances of being invisible. In the following excerpt, Hannah talks about being inaudible as a related aspect of being invisible. In her situation, an outing can be particularly frustrating because she suffers from a condition that prevents her from standing too long and to be balanced when walking or standing still. Her statement highlights the frequency with which this sort of ageist behaviour occurs and it also suggests that she has reflected about it in depth, suggesting that people's attitudes in public places can undermine the person's self-esteem with consequent negative impacts on his or her sense of control over the environment (Findlay & McLaughlin 2005). Her words clearly mirror the rage to which she exposes herself to during many of her daily outings:

> *Hannah*: I'm invisible, *invisible*. People don't see me. They bump into me because they haven't seen me. (…) And if I'm standing at the bar trying to get a drink I can stand with my money like that and they don't serve me. I think it's probably worse because I'm short and because I'm a woman, but I think it happens more often because I'm old, just become invisible, and also inaudible, you know if I say something I'm ignored sometimes. (…) Oh, it's horrible (to be ignored). For example, I go into the chemist here and there are two chairs, I sit down as it's very uncomfortable for me to stand; somebody comes out of the back room into the shop area, a man is standing who is coming after me, he gets served, somebody else gets served, and I go "Excuse me, I think I was here first", but nobody gives me my turn because I'm old, because I'm a woman, because I'm sitting down, because they can't see me, because they can't hear me. It happens all the time! I need to sit down, but that makes me completely ignorable, ignorable. (72, Brighton)

Public spaces become the arena where age identities are publicly enacted and stigmatised through social interactions. Some old women try to manage their identity by resisting the stigma through efforts to make themselves visible, as Matilda's example has demonstrated. This section has highlighted that the ways in which the general public interacts with older people can seriously impact an old person's confidence and can affect the likelihood of enjoying the whole outdoor experience. However, it is found that the majority of research subjects do not feel treated differently from other people, especially those who adopt a positive attitude towards later life. Moreover, if a different treatment happened, it would not be interpreted as being age-related. On one hand, there are consolidated societal stereotypes

about old age that represent only an assumptive reality; on the other, many older people are now healthier and more active and do not relate to nor feel represented by those images. The translation of this dualism in everyday public life is that many older people do not feel discriminated and use those stereotypes sometimes at their own advantage (i.e., by playing the role of the *old person*). Nonetheless, women and more frail individuals might feel exposed to ageist behaviours and they may even justify them at times. This consideration highlights the complexity of what it means to grow old in contemporary societies where fixed age stages are less distinct and multiple pressures on older people's identities have increased exponentially (Biggs, 2005). This consideration also stresses that research on the everyday life of older people should not assume the homogeneity of older people's feelings, needs and expectations.

To conclude, this chapter has explored older people's experiences of everyday social interactions in the public spaces of the city. The first section has addressed the first research question and has analysed the ways in which interactions with other people influence older people's experiences of urban public spaces. The nuanced meanings of sociability have been highlighted as they emerged from the data. Generally, older people are observed to express scarce interest in social contact with neighbours and strangers during daily outings for everyday purposes. However, although older people do not particularly enjoy passing encounters or casual verbal interactions, they take pleasure in being alone in the company of strangers in some places. For example, many prefer to spend some time in a café or a park rather than at home, because being a spectator of the city life provides an invaluable emotional boost. The discussion of safety issues showed that other people's presence in the public realm can impact on individuals' perception of safety in different ways, both positive and negative. In addition, fear does not emerge as being gender-defined, and several male participants express concerns about frequenting some areas at night. In consideration of the second research question, positive and negative ageist attitudes enacted by other people were found to constitute a further form of social interaction with a long lasting influence on people's self. The chapter has also emphasised that natural environments are not always linked to positive feelings of security and restoration. Similarly, built environments do not necessarily instil anxiety or suspicion in people's perceptions but they can also arouse pleasant feelings normally attributed to natural landscapes. Moreover, the data suggest that older people are happy to live in the city and do not wish to move elsewhere, even those who complain about the hustle and bustle of urban life and people's ruthlessness in public places.

Chapter 6 – Perceptions of the urban landscape

Urban design and the sociability of public places

In this section, the discussion of the qualitative data engages with the last research question by exploring the interplay between urban environmental features and sociability of places. It has been argued that the design of neighbourhoods influences the ways in which people interact informally outdoors, and therefore it plays a key role in supporting opportunities to enhance social contact and sense of community (Sugiyama & Thompson 2007). This section considers strands of research that examine the ways in which the design of public spaces might encourage or hinder structured and unstructured sociability (Fincher 2003; Greed 1999; Holland et al. 2007; Newton et al. 2010; Sauter & Huettenmoser 2008; Semenza & March 2009) and also the ways in which design ameliorates or undermines older people's navigation of the built environment (Blackman et al. 2003; Burton & Mitchell 2006; Matusoka & Kaplan 2008; Newton et al. 2010; Phillips et al. 2013; Phillips et al. 2010; Risser et al. 2010; Valdemarsson et al. 2005; Walford et al. 2011). The shared vision among such studies is the creation of places that attract and are enjoyed by heterogeneous sectors of the population. Findings from research on the physical barriers experienced by older people suggest that planning environments that meet the needs of the older population would benefit other age groups as well (Phillips et al. 2013). It is undeniable that actions such as clutter and rubbish removal from pavements, enhancement of street lighting and pedestrian crossings, provision of more seating spaces and toilets cannot be detrimental to any user of the space. Indeed, planners might need to compromise between contrasting interests of different stakeholders while thinking of ways to plan inclusive places "for all". Nevertheless, planners' attention to issues around accessibility, safety, transport and attractiveness of places might benefit citizens amongst all age groups (Hockey et al. 2013).

In her call for a kind of social town planning that recognises and responds to diversity, Fincher (2003) claims that planning might create cities that encourage difference and encounter and that are places where:

> "diverse groups' needs will be recognised. Entrenched differences – locational disadvantages and advantages – will be minimised. Convivial interactions – the coming together of strangers – will be encouraged." (p.11)

This research draws on these considerations and is particularly interested in looking at whether and how the design of spaces appears to influence convivial interactions. Urban planning that considers ageing and the needs of older people tends to concentrate on housing, accessibility and mobility. By doing so, it overlooks other significant elements that influence people's wellbeing, e.g. the attractiveness of a place and its relation to social interactions, activity and health (Hockey et al. 2013). Studies on conviviality and design claim that a number of environmental qualities are found to support socialisation on streets. For instance, Mehta (2009) mentions seating spaces near stores and businesses, sidewalk width, provision of shade and shelter, personalisation of stores' street-frontage, presence of community places where people can meet such as cafés and bookshops. He highlights that areas with no particularly interesting things to see or do are likely to be unattractive and unsupportive of people's passive or active interactions. The point is that lively places are potentially social places, whereas sociability is more unlikely to manifest in "dead spaces" (p.55), as it appears also among the subjects of this study:

> *Grace*: I tend not to use the cafés and restaurants in the Churchill Square (shopping centre), I'd rather go in an area called The Laines… I much prefer it down there, more atmosphere. I mean, the shopping centre is plastic, whereas in The Laines there is an atmosphere, there are things going on, is buzzy, if it's good you can sit outside in the sunshine, there are lots of Italian restaurants and little bars and pubs… (64, Brighton)

In addition, Kelly (2012) argues that a reduction of crime rates and insecurity is likely to be pursued more effectively if the attention is turned to the liveliness of streets rather than with the use of physical instruments such as CCTV or businesses' shutters. In light of these considerations, both works by Mehta and Kelly suggest that the inclusive and welcoming atmosphere of local businesses plays a positive role in support to outdoor sociability. Although elements such as those mentioned by Mehta can assist people's interaction, it is generally recognised within the academic and policy literature that design by itself cannot determine people's behaviours. As Kelly (2012) underlines in a Grattan Institute report,

"[d]esign is not destiny. (...) Overt attempts to engineer social interaction can backfire as people often withdraw when they feel their privacy is under threat" (p.10).

By looking at the data of this research, significant relationships between the design of public spaces and the ways in which older people interact with others cannot be inferred. This is not intended to disregard or reject the significant role played by urban design in influencing the quality of people's outdoor experiences, but the data suggest that design per se does not appear to encourage older people's convivial interactions. Du Toit et al. (2007) express a similar consideration in a study that looks at the interrelationships between pedestrian-friendly environments and local sociability. The authors do not find a relationship between walkability of a neighbourhood and local sociability, questioning the supposedly positive association between pedestrian-oriented design and social interactions. This point raises also broader questions about sociability in contemporary Western societies and reminds us of Laurier and Philo's (2006) provocative statement on the actual need of people to interact more in the public realm (see p.33). As previously mentioned in the chapter, the data show that older people in this research do not necessarily want to interact with other users of public spaces during their everyday trips. Nevertheless, being outdoors among other people and being part of the vibrant life of the city is unquestionably valued amongst the respondents because it reduces the chances to feel isolated and detached from the rest of society. Related to this, the design of restorative and convivial spaces (e.g., parks, squares, cafés and libraries) certainly plays a key role in improving the overall outing experience and consequently in enhancing individuals' wellbeing.

The fact that design of public spaces does not seem to influence older people's sociability may relate to individuals' difficulties in thinking about issues that do not figure as prominent at the conscious level. When prompted to discuss about urban features that might encourage or discourage social interactions, the subjects hesitated and found it difficult to articulate an answer. Therefore, the possibility that participants provided a response that they supposed the interviewer wanted to hear cannot be excluded, probably because of the "wish to spare the feelings of a younger researcher's naiveté about the experience of aging" (Biggs 2005, p.S123). An effort to please the interlocutor is noticeable in Benjamin's words in the following example:

> *Benjamin*: I guess some places can encourage interactions... I haven't thought about that. Seating when you are old is very useful for interactions actually. I suppose how you arrange the seating and providing enough seating… You know, if you are walking around a museum, and there is a seat where you can sit down and seats where other people can sit down, it will be very likely that you start saying "What do you think about this?" (Hackney, 65)

The excerpt is representative also of the answers provided by other subjects, given that participants' responses often concerned the availability of seating such as benches. Indeed, seating has been identified in urban studies and environmental psychology as an effective tool to improve sociability and prolong people's stay in public spaces (Mehta 2009). However, when the same older people were asked whether they would actually avail themselves of a seating space to start a conversation with the unacquainted, for instance at a museum or at a park, their answers were usually negative. This is either due to disinterest in that sort of social interaction or to the fear of looking lonely, odd and – if male – there may be the concern to send a message based on sexuality if they approached a woman or a child. As mentioned already, an ordinary outing is appreciated because of the opportunity to be among others in public spaces in passive and undemanding way, whereas direct verbal interaction that may occur on public premises in most cases is not encouraged or considered as important.

An individual may find it difficult to reflect on the connections between urban design and sociability because of the unordinary nature of the exercise, which might be part of the reason why the research subjects were confused when they were asked to formulate thoughts about it. To overcome this difficulty, with some participants the issue was approached from a different angle by asking if there were particular public spaces where they happened to interact more during their everyday journeys. These subjects mentioned a whole spectrum of places, which are usually located in the neighbourhood or in other areas frequented regularly, and which include greengrocers, banks, market stalls, cafés and restaurants. They expressed pleasure in the reciprocal recognition that occurs between them and familiar strangers and they described the interactions as a simple nod with the head, a wave with the hand or a brief conversation with a neighbour or a shop attendant. The responses do not relate directly to the design of the place but rather to the familiarity with it and to the attitudes of those "familiar strangers" and the general public. This consideration supports Biggs and Tinker's (2007)

argument that even when the infrastructures that support older people's use of public spaces are available in metropolitan areas, the most influential factor in creating truly age-friendly places remains the attitude of other people towards older people. Familiarity with a place may translate into regular attendance, especially for what concerns family businesses such as local grocery stores that contribute to give identity to the neighbourhood. In his study, Mehta (2009) finds that people prefer to support smaller businesses because they are considered as an important part of the neighbourhood, they are perceived as friendlier and better looked after. This research supports Mehta's considerations, as many research subjects claimed to prefer small independent businesses. However, some respondents recognised a discrepancy between personal preference and actual choice, as those who claimed to be supportive of small local stores admitted to frequent often also bigger or new and very popular businesses at the expenses of the former. The two excerpts below demonstrate the sense of loyalty to smaller businesses that is developed by several older people and the role of such places in encouraging the liveliness of the neighbourhood:

> *Megan*: My fruit and vegetables shop is lovely, it's my favourite! But I feel a bit sad because there is a new one open and I go to the new one now and I do feel disloyal. Because this new one is very popular, you know?
> *Chiara*: Do you go to the new one because it's popular?
> *Megan*: No no no! It's just lovely fruit but… I mean I'm in between whether I desert the new one and I go back to my local one, because they know me in that one because I've been going there for years! I feel very disloyal! (64, Hackney)

> *Matthew*: I've used that shop for most of the time I've lived here, I use it because he is a small shopkeeper who is very friendly, he helps his customers and particularly older people. Sometimes if they've forgotten their money he says "Well you pay me tomorrow". He only does it with people he knows, but there are a lot of customers who are regular so they know him and he knows them and there is a lot of trust. Just next there is a supermarket that opened a couple of years ago but I don't go there for my newspaper because the supermarket has taken already a lot of trade away from the little shop where I go, so I rather support him. I think it's

> important to have variety, communities need lots of different shops… Apart from choice it keeps the place more alive I think. (70, Hove)

Although the way in which a public space is designed does not seem particularly relevant to encourage sociability among older citizens, it is recognised to influence individuals' perception of it and hence its use. This is valid for open spaces such as streets or parks as well as for privately owned public places such as cafés. Local businesses can ameliorate the aspect of an area by decorating the inside and outside of their premises in special ways that might encourage people's window-shopping, browsing, lingering and individual's overall likeability of the surroundings (Mehta 2009). In line with this consideration, the respondents of this research expressed appreciation for specific physical characteristics, in particular areas with little shops, grocery stores, cafés and some greenery, because dedicated businesses can make the environment lively and enjoyable:

> *Hannah*: Oh this is the ironmonger (looking at a photo), they put all these lovely flowers outside and I think it's just a lovely display! (72, Hove)

> *Amber*: This area is nice, it's just pleasant. It's a little parade of shops, mostly with sitting outside, there's the fish shop here, the vegetable place and a butcher there, so it's all quite handy. But I don't shop there except to go to the whole food place and the fish shop, because I buy my vegetables and my meat mostly in the farmers' market or in the supermarket. These would be the two shops that I would go to, but I might just get off the bus at that stop and walk along to other street to go to Waitrose, just because it's exercise and it's a nice area.
> *Chiara*: Would you be able to tell me what is it that makes it nice?
> *Amber*: Oh, that's very difficult… It's wide, the pavement is quite spacious, you can easily walk, even if there are quite a lot of people walking it's still very easy, you can see away. There are the trees which makes it look nice, the building are quite interesting, old. It obviously feels very safe. (Hackney, 79)

Like other participants, Amber frames her narrative around the physical layout of the environment that enhances her outdoor experiences, but she does not relate it to more intangible aspects on the sociability of places. As discussed above, the lack of mention about

such aspects is possibly caused by the difficulty to recognise the role of social elements in ordinary outdoor experiences, especially the interconnections between physical and social spheres. Nevertheless, we have seen that being outdoors and seeing things and people has a positive impact on individuals' psychological and physical wellbeing, suggesting that the reciprocal influence between social and physical spheres may play a role at a more unconscious level.

The different roles of public places in old age

The analysis of participants' narratives about their journeys in the city revealed that two principal roles are attributed to public places in older people's life, which are discussed in this section in consideration of issues around accessibility and physical layout of public places. The first role relates to everyday places and their main function in satisfying primary needs, while the second concerns the social sphere of places and therefore the satisfaction of social needs, which enhance overall wellbeing. The last section highlights how positive and negative environmental qualities that have been reported by the subjects can impact on their experiences of using and perceiving public places.

Everyday spaces, functional places

As suggested by the quantitative data discussed in Chapter 4, the respondents tend to visit places that have a primary function in satisfying basic needs, such as greengrocers, other small stores, supermarkets, newsagents, post offices, chemists and banks. These facilities are not located at walking distance in all participants' cases, as some need to be reached by bus or car. Nevertheless, the subjects would opt to walk to most places whenever possible to combine the journey with some physical exercise, given that all subjects are capable of undertaking these journeys and related tasks with no assistance from others. As people age, reaching such destinations is an opportunity to preserve independence, self-esteem and control over the environment. Nowadays there are increasing possibilities to shop and book

online, and older people may not necessarily need to go out unless they wanted to. Hence, going out becomes a deliberate decision. Most participants are aware of online grocery shopping and some use this service to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. Nevertheless, the majority of participants prefer to go to the stores and this is motivated by the opportunity to do some light exercise and also to satisfy social and spiritual needs.

The places mentioned above – in particular independent local businesses – are appreciated by older people because of their ameliorative function in vitalising the area while promoting the local economy. Significantly, those places provide sociable opportunities and become part of an enjoyable weekly or daily routine. Indeed, the regularity of their visits encourages people's confidence in accessing such places and increases their familiarity with the owners and the staff as they are recognised and greeted. In particular, food shopping is one of the most frequent purposes of outdoor expeditions; those older people with a car tend to undertake only one shopping trip per week, whereas the main trend is to visit food stores more frequently during the week and buy fewer goods. First of all, this is because planning for food generally is not felt as necessary due to greater time availability that allows older people to undertake casual shopping and to carry lighter weights. Moreover, shopping seen as a sequence of visits to different small shops is an enjoyable activity for the majority of older people:

> *Megan*: I like to shop much more now locally and daily, I don't stock up on food, I go to the shop every other day for the next day really. (64, Hackney)

> *Penelope*: I hate shopping if you take it in the broader sense; I'm not someone who wants to go wandering around the shopping malls or the high streets, just looking at shops. I find it makes me wanting to buy stuff that I don't need or want, it makes me feel greedy. But I do find that if I can't do the food shopping I miss that, I miss selecting and looking at things, so I do quite enjoy shopping for food. I quite like the fact that I'm doing little shops, obviously when you're working you just do one big shop. (64, Brighton)

If we consider the photographs taken by all research subjects we observe a considerable number of functional places, food stores in particular:

- 37 photos of greengrocers and small stores by 20 participants
- 32 photos of supermarkets by 21 people
- 8 photos of services such as banks, post offices and chemists by 6 subjects

The number of photos taken of food stores is similar to the number of photos portraying supermarkets, and the subjects consider them both as part of their everyday life. However, there is a marked difference in people's narratives about them. Comments about supermarkets are generally characterised by indifference if not aversion while comments on small independent shops suggest enjoyment and pleasure about the whole shopping experience, as Zoe's excerpt exemplifies:

> *Zoe*: Occasionally I cycle along the canal to the Angel, I do like the Angel for shopping.[12]
> *Chiara*: In the shopping centre?
> *Zoe*: No, just little shops along the high street, you know, little shops. I'm not keen on shopping centres really, because they are impersonal, I just don't like it, they are impersonal, plastic, constructed, too much artificiality. I like to be outside a lot and if I go to a shop as I like walking in the street, I like the air on my face. (60, Hackney)

In Hackney, the recent regeneration of some areas (e.g., Stoke Newington) has been accompanied by the opening of new greengrocers and by the transformation of some marketplaces, which the respondents appear to appreciate. Also old independent butchers and fishmongers are very much enjoyed among the participants and they constitute a particular sort of landmark. Chapter 5 (p.142) stressed that some participants enjoy marketplaces especially because they bring people on the streets and create a lively atmosphere. It can be observed that the Hackney quotes reported on p.143 belong to people in their early 60s. They refer to a specific market in Hackney that has been rejuvenated over the last few years as a result of the recent gentrification of the area, and which caters for mid and upper class customers of younger age groups. The majority of participants who claimed to go to markets quite regularly are in their 60s. Then, the frequency of visits decreases

12. Commercial and retail area in Islington, the borough on the Western border of Hackney.

drastically for people in their 70s and stops in their 80s. The fact that people in their 60s are attracted by markets that cater for people between 20 and 40 years old is interesting because it reinforces the idea that nowadays life stages have become more blurred and the threshold that identifies old age is less distinguishable (Biggs 2005). In other words, a regenerated public space that is enjoyed by younger adults or youths could also be enjoyed by older people (which in this study is verified for older people in their 60s), with implications for planning practices especially in participatory planning.[13] Arguably, we may assume older people as unlikely to be supportive of changes to the local environment (Galčanová & Sýkorová 2014; Phillips et al. 2011), in particular in ways that attract younger people. However, this may be a misleading preconception contrasted by the data. On a similar note, Gilroy opposes the idea that creating spaces with older people in mind cannot offer anything to younger people, because this is based on ageism (Gilroy 2008, p.160). Data from this research emphasise the positive reaction of many participants in Hackney to changes of the urban environment. The positive response is explained by the consequences of redevelopment, which has enhanced the vibrancy of the areas and has increased the opportunities to access a variety of stores. Indeed, not all subjects expressed the same enthusiasm, and differences depended mostly on age and class. With regard to marketplaces within regenerated areas, respondents in their 60s or of upper and middle classes appeared to enjoy the changes whereas older ones or people of working class tended to find those regenerated markets less affordable or attractive:

> *Alexander*: What's changed is that let's say five years ago you hardly saw middle class young couples around, hardly ever, and now because the housing suits them there is loads establishing themselves and this has completely changed the atmosphere for the better. And if you walk that way in Hackney Wick it's like kind of Paris, very vibrant, lots happening, it's all young white middle class couple and that's quite a change. (63, Hackney)

> *Matilda*: The atmosphere in Broadway Market has changed a lot, it's much more up market, you know what I mean? And I don't like that. All these young people, and they all have dogs (laughs). It is a bit posy, it didn't use to

13. The distinguishing precept of participatory planning is the involvement of local communities and stakeholders in the planning process (see Kindon et al. 2007).

be like that, it was an ordinary market and it was better from my point of view. (76, Hackney)

Another market in Hackney was mentioned by several subjects and is frequented also by a less affluent clientele. Yet, many participants would not buy anything there because they would not trust the traders and the quality of the foods. It can be argued that the age-related decline of visits to markets among older people and the difficulty of those with little economic power to find a suitable compromise between regenerated markets and low quality-food markets raise questions about the supposed social inclusion of the marketplace for the older population as a whole (cf. Watson 2006). Potentially, local markets could be tailored to meet the needs of different groups of society. However, some rejuvenated markets within the London borough suggest a different business tendency that results in encouraging some older people while discouraging others on the basis of economic power and age. Given that markets represent places where positive sociability materialises, it is argued that local authorities might want to retain ordinary markets that are not excluding spaces alongside new more expensive markets if they want to achieve the goals of social inclusion and sustainable communities so emphasised in current political debates.

Older people lamented the closure of local businesses with some nostalgic comments regarding the previous aspect of the area, especially in Brighton & Hove. The reasons for the likeability of local businesses among the respondents are similar to those mentioned in regard to markets. In particular, people appreciate them because they create a more characteristic atmosphere and they support local economies, with a positive effect on the liveliness of the area. The following quotes are emblematic of these feelings in the two localities:

Chiara: Do you like it? (George Street, main shopping street in Hove)
Eve: Bah, it's alright, it's not as rundown as London Road, the trouble with a lot of shopping centres is now they are all charity shops and so… Because it used to be places like fishmongers, butchers and greengrocers here, you know this was a proper shopping centre, whereas now it's coffee shops, building societies and hairdressers and cafés.
Chiara: How long ago was it when it was different with butchers and so on?
Eve: Oh I suppose 20 years ago, I don't know because we lived for 13-14 years, we used to live in Brighton, which again it's changed, because

everywhere you went it was a butcher, a baker, you know, and now it's all supermarkets and cafés.

Chiara: Did you like it better as it was before?

Eve: Oh yeah yeah! It was much more interesting. Now most of Brighton is sort of rundown and tatty I think so it's not as nice as it was.

Chiara: Even here in George Street.

Eve: Mh mh... Although they've made it nicer, you know it's pedestrianised and there's cafés and things like that so it's nice, but it's not the most beautiful street… but it's alright, I quite like shopping in it. (67, Hove)

Penelope: This is changed a lot since we first moved here (residential street in Brighton with parade of shops), the first one used to be a hairdresser, the second one used to be a greengrocer, the third one used to be a butcher…

Chiara: Has it changed for the worse or the better?

Penelope: Well in terms of shopping for the worst, that empty one was an off license, then there was a mini-market, which is now replaced but only very recently replaced, for about 20 years there wasn't a mini market there. So those, for the elderly, provided everything they needed. What was very good is that when that was an off license they had the basic essentials that anyone elderly could get. (64, Brighton)

Joseph: This is a new thing that has only arrived last year, but it's an excellent greengrocer as greengrocers used to be, you don't see many of those greengrocers anymore, but that's a new shop and they offer an incredible variety of vegetables and fruit. I've been there a couple of times, we don't need that many because I still go to Ridley Road (market) to do the shopping but when we run out of something I tend to go to that shop because I know they have an interesting variety. (65, Hackney)

As Gilroy (2008) stresses, the variety of available facilities is invaluable to older people's wellbeing because it supports personal independence by increasing the opportunities to satisfy simple everyday needs such as buying bread or send a letter at the post office. Therefore, she maintains, it is important to find ways to retain or reinvest in local facilities as a major contribution to older people's quality of life. Overall, several older people in both cities expressed concern with regard to the possible closure of local stores in the area as a

consequence of the recent opening of bigger supermarkets. This is because a shopping experience characterised by a number of visits to different stores is considered more pleasant due to the perception of walking through areas with greater significance and charm than those more clinical "non-places" such as supermarkets (Augé 1995). This is true for relatively quiet zones as well as for busier shopping areas, which can be enjoyable spaces for older people and not just for younger generations of consumers. Research commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows a tendency among older people to avoid busy shopping areas, especially at particular times of the day and when younger people are around (Holland et al. 2007). However, this research suggests that bustling commercial areas can attract the older population as many subjects claimed to go to shopping areas even at busy times provided that they can find the things they need. The mobility patterns displayed in Figures 9 and 10 in Chapter 4 support this result, given the high density of GPS records around shopping destinations, including commercial streets and shopping centres. As a general trend, older people claimed that they frequent such areas with a precise purpose rather than for a leisurely stroll, although people's experiences of shopping spaces that bustle with economic activity vary depending on both the place and the individual's personality. For example, a few Hackney residents went to Liverpool Street just to visit the targeted shops and they returned home straight after.[14] Instead, one subject enjoys going to Brick Lane market near Liverpool Street because he developed a Saturday habit of visiting the flea market since his childhood.[15] Also people in Brighton enjoy strolling just for pleasure in the busy Laine that is characterised by variety of shops and a lively atmosphere, and it is also viewed as a repository of history and memories:

> *Grace*: I normally wouldn't go to Churchill Square with no reason (the main shopping centre area), I might stay and do other things, just to wander around. I mean we might meet all in Churchill Square and might use the shops in there because they are good and they are convenient, but then we actually went down to The Laine, we went to a place called Browns, it's lovely, and it's only a five minutes' walk from the shopping centre. So yeah I'd rather socialise in The Laine, there are a lot of pubs and it's residence of

14. Busy area in central London with a variety of shops and services. Well connected to Hackney by public transport.

15. Historical market in Tower Hamlets (London borough, Southern border of Hackney) established in the 17th century and developed over the 20th century. Currently a very popular market among youths and young adults.

> my childhood and I used to go to pubs all around The Laine, it's a bit of a trip down memory lane. (64, Brighton)

Although the survey provides a picture of a limited period of time (seven days) of a small sample of people (50) and has no presumption to statistical validity, it nevertheless identifies some interesting patterns. For example, Chapter 4 showed that survey results do not report meaningful difference in the type of places visited by females and males during their week of participation in the project. This is true in particular with regard to visits to places with a functional role such as food stores, banks and post offices. Hence, it would appear that gender becomes a much less pivotal factor in determining the sort of places visited and the reasons to go outdoors compared to earlier periods of life (see p.91). For example, research shows that middle age women go to shopping centres more often than men (Day 2007), whereas no difference is found in this sample. This may relate to the fact that older women usually are not targeted as recreational shoppers and in part because of a reduced interest in specific types of shopping such as clothes shopping.

Even participants' comments about everyday routines do not account for significant gender differences with regard to the places frequented. The vast majority of older people claimed to eschew routines that might structure their outdoor life, especially when it comes to shopping, as people tend to buy foods as they feel like or when required. The analysis of the qualitative data suggests that a few years after retirement the respondents are likely to abandon outdoor routines as the period of adaptation to the new lifestyle is past. Then, older people start enjoying a less regimented lifestyle, as the quotes below exemplify:

> *Zoe*: At first I had a very strict routine, I used to do a timetable every day, because when I was at school I had my day split into half hour sessions because I was on one-to-one program and I saw children for half an hour throughout the day so very much a routine and very tightly regulated, and at first when I retired I did try to have that structure, but now I'm not so… Once you get over the first two years, which I have, then it goes into this wonderful flowering of all sort possibilities and it's lovely! (60, Hackney)

> *Amber*: I think I got over that (laugh) (the need of having routines), I got over that bit, and every day you can think... Well, perhaps I need to do things, perhaps I made an arrangement to do something, but on the other

> hand all day may be completely empty. The garden especially in the summer will take a fair amount of time, but when I first retired I was 60 and to begin with… ehm… my mother at that time was in her 80s so she needed quite a bit of help so I spent quite a lot of time visiting her making sure she was ok, and next door there was an older woman and she needed help, so funnily enough I slotted into this… (79, Hackney)

Although the majority of people's accounts depict a rather relaxed and spontaneous approach to daily life and accomplishment of everyday tasks, data from both males and females suggest that outdoor routines actually exist. Indeed, these relate more to physical exercise and organised activities or events, i.e. going to leisure and community centres for classes, going to parks to exercise or to walk the dog and going to weekly markets to shop or for a stroll. Nonetheless, there are a few exceptions that identify routine practices unrelated to organised activities, as the comment below demonstrates:

> *Max*: I like wandering around the town. Phillip and I walk around, he leaves my place on Saturday morning around 10:00, I then meet him in town at 11.30, we have coffee and we have lunch and we walk around the streets and we look at this and that, just looking in The Laines, looking at the passing crowd, etcetera. That's what we have always done on Saturday morning for ten years, always (smiles). (69, Hove)

Max's routine began in his early 60s when he was still at work and it is likely to be encouraged by specific personal circumstances, i.e. it is a way to ensure that he will spend at least a minimum amount of leisurely time with his partner every weekend. Similar routines are described also by other participants, married in most cases, and relate in particular to weekly shopping expeditions rather than recreational or cultural activities.

Places of sociability, recreation and restoration

Functional places provide older people with opportunities for casual socialisation. However, other frequently visited public places cover a more specific socio-recreational role and a restorative function, exerting a major influence on older people's wellbeing. As it emerges from the qualitative data, these places are represented by leisure and community centres, cafés, pubs, restaurants, libraries, parks, community allotments, markets, art galleries, theatre, cinemas and – in a minority of cases – sacred places. The urban environment responds with a particularly vast range of choices to people's demands for opportunities to socialise, relax and pursue cultural activities, which is reflected by the high number of photos taken of such places by the research subjects:

- 32 photos of leisure centres by 25 people
- 24 of different cafés by 16 people
- 19 of family-pubs by 14 people
- 10 of restaurants by 8 people
- 12 of libraries by 11 people
- 54 of parks by 26 people
- 7 of community allotments by 5 people
- 14 of markets by 9 people
- 4 of art galleries by 4 people
- 20 of theatres and cinemas by 12 people
- 10 of sacred places (churches and a Buddhist temple) by 8 people

Places that encourage meaningful socialisation such as community centres or places that enable people to interact with other individuals with similar interests like community allotments are highly valued among the research subjects. According to the socioemotional selectivity theory developed by Carstensen (1995), with increasing age people tend to see their future as progressively limited and consequently become more selective about social relationships and activities, choosing to dedicate time only to the things and people that are most important to them. Although this may be true for some of the research subjects, the majority of them seem determined to keep busy with hobbies and occupations and to proactively maintain – if not even expand – their social networks, precisely *because of* the awareness of the more limited life time available, which spurs them on to engage with people

and places. Similar strong motivation is reported in a study by Ziegler and Schwanen (2011) as they find that older people's own determination is the key factor in enabling them to engage with the world, be socially active and physically mobile (p.769). In urban areas, the abundance of recreational and cultural stimuli is a resource to those older people who want and are able to meet other people, join groups and take up new activities. The high number of photos taken of recreational places demonstrates the relevance of social and physical engagement in older people's everyday life. In particular, leisure and community centres, cafés, pub-restaurants, art galleries, cinemas and theatres emerge as the most frequented places to socialise with acquaintances, friends or relatives, while parks are mostly used as places to relax and undertake light physical exercise. The majority of cafés, pubs and restaurants may be thought of as places tailored to meet the preferences of young people and younger adults. However, the data suggest that even newly designed cafés as well as specific franchising restaurants are enjoyed also by the older population, similar to what was found with regard to rejuvenated marketplaces in gentrified areas of Hackney (p.180).

As an example, the following excerpt shows how regenerated public places can be very attractive to older people too. Megan enjoys spending some leisurely time with her friend at a renowned area in central London that has been gentrified and redesigned with cafés and shops that reflect the tastes of the youths. The area includes also a flower market, whose stalls have remained the same as years ago in contrast to the surrounding setting. The photo that accompanies the excerpt is exceptionally interesting because it demonstrates that a rainy day does not necessarily prevent older people from going out and limit their social life (Figure 18). Also the excerpt is of particular interest because it highlights how the environmental qualities that influence older people's experience are not only physical but sensorial too:

> *Megan*: Before I started rowing I was always there (Flower Market, Tower Hamlets London, Figure 18). I like mornings and I think this is a lovely place to be in the morning. I always buy a few plants there for my garden. Now if I go down I go with a friend and you end up having a lovely coffee in some cafés. I used to go there 20 years ago and it was more clumsy, more basic, but lovely. Nowadays is more little shops, and flowers and cafés, has changed… It's lovely, just lovely colours, and the noise, the sounds. (64, Hackney)

Figure 18 – Megan's photo of Sunday flower market in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, Hackney

Degen and Rose (2012) underline that people normally experience the city through a variety of sensory modalities that include but are not limited to the visual. In addition, they argue that different forms of built environments provoke specific sensory experiences. In the case above, the narrow, colourful, lively and sociable street generates a particular atmosphere that is influenced by the human senses. The hearing of sounds and noises of the area emerges as equally relevant to the visual, and arguably to the smelling of odours being it a flower market. Markets and cafés are examples of places that encourage recreation and sociability for all ages, including older people. Libraries appear also to be another significant recreational place where older people enjoy going for different reasons, either to borrow films or books or to do research on topics of interest. In both cities the most central libraries have undergone recent refurbishment and the subjects appreciate them as they express contentment with the modern design and the availability of different offers (e.g., wider range of books, activities, more rooms and facilities such as cafés). Libraries are visited rather often because the quiet atmosphere allows older people to feel comfortable in being alone while enjoying the presence of other people:

> *Martin*: This is the library (Hackney Central Library), it's a very nice environment, it's social and because of that you feel sort of relaxed and you have people that read and people at the computers, you know… (Hackney)

The Jubilee Library in Brighton offers movie screenings every week that are attended by several people in the sample as they represent a recreational occasion and an opportunity to chat with acquaintances that regularly join the event. Similar to the new Dalston Library in Hackney, the space in the Jubilee Library in Brighton accommodates for sociability as they are both provided with a café area where people can linger and mingle, read a newspaper and have a drink or something to eat:

> *Emily*: Occasionally we would get a drink there but I mean... you can borrow a newspaper there, some older people I know really just sit in there, I mean I don't find it *that* welcoming and I wouldn't want to sit there for very long but... sometimes I'd have a coffee there, sometimes I'd just have a quick look through the local paper, usually the local paper to see if there is anything interesting... I don't buy papers so it's the place to look at the papers. (68, Brighton)

> *Hannah*: In the library in Brighton they have free film on Sunday lunch time, so I go to the free film, that costs me nothing, then I go with a friend and we have a hot chocolate in the Redroaster (independent coffee house near the library) and we talk about the film. And you know the day has cost me a hot chocolate! (72, Brighton)

The library is not a gender-defined public place as both male and female participants access it to borrow books, however there are variations in individuals' use. More precisely, a few men both in Hackney and Brighton claimed to stay in the library to undertake some research and write or to use the computer. Instead, women tend to use it simply to borrow books and read newspapers or for social activities like the movie screening in Brighton, which incidentally does not register the attendance of any men among the respondents. Either way, libraries attract a considerable number of older people, making such places an important landmark in the urban landscape. A different sort of landmark is the traditional English pub. Comments on pubs differ widely according to individuals' biographies, for example to some respondents the pub is not a significant place because they did not frequent it in their youth or because they do

not enjoy drinking alcohol and therefore they would prefer to go to a café if they wanted to meet friends somewhere in the city. Although nowadays non-alcoholic drinks are served in pubs as well as cafés, some people may associate pubs to a drinking culture and attitude that is not regarded as attractive:

> *Amber*: When I was young pubs weren't the sort of places that women went to just on their own… it was odd. I mean now that would be perfectly alright, but I find it on the whole that… I'm not interested in drinking, I'm very fond of wine but I drink that with the meal, I don't like just going and sitting and drinking really. (79, Hackney)

> *Chiara*: Do you also go to pubs with your friends?
> *Stanley*: Very very rarely, it is usually cafés. There is not a pub that I go to regularly, I am not frightened or apprehensive of going to a pub but I just don't have any calls to go to a pub. (81, Brighton)

Nevertheless, the pub is an enjoyable place to be with friends and relatives for many of the research subjects. In particular, older people seem to appreciate family-pubs and country-pubs that meet the needs of different age groups and thus are perceived as more welcoming. Chapter 5 reported an excerpt from Matilda, who was lamenting the invisibility to which she undergoes in some places and precisely she reported an episode occurred in a pub (p.169). However, the following excerpt taken from Matilda clearly demonstrates that the sociability and camaraderie of the pub can also be amusing and enjoyable for older women depending on the environment and atmosphere of the pub:

> *Matilda*: The funny thing of Wetherspoon is the people, interesting people. They are not very... how can I say without being snobby... they are you know not the top people, and they sit around their table and they talk away, sometimes they have an argument you know... sometimes somebody will start to sing, and it makes me laugh that, it does make me laugh. I quite like to be in the pub, I like the atmosphere. (76, Hackney)

Generally, pubs may be thought of as places that tend to be socially exclusive rather than inclusive, especially for older people and women. However, as mentioned above, some pubs can be appealing to older customers and can be welcoming even towards older people who

may walk in on their own, as Sophie's excerpt illustrates below. Similar to people's use of cafés as seen in Chapter 5, a few participants might go into a pub on their own provided that they feel comfortable and are familiar with the locale:

> *Chiara*: Do you like going to pubs then?
> *Sophie*: Ehm… just that one, not… you know there are some that are scruffy and full of men looking bored, and this is a family one, really a family one. It's very comfortable in there, I was sometimes going for coffee and I had a newspaper, so I sit and have my coffee because you know it's not expensive, some cafés are £2 or £3 for a coffee and here is £1 something. (80, Brighton)

The visit to a socio-recreational place is a deliberate decision to avoid a deleterious process of retreat in the home. In other words, such decision stems from the individual's willingness to engage with the world and to be socially and physically active. Cities like London and Brighton & Hove are particularly prolific in terms of social, cultural and recreational stimuli. However, in less urbanised environments, suburbs or even rundown areas within inner cities there may be more limited opportunities, which may constrain older people's activities and the variety of places that can be frequented.

Negative and positive environmental features

The analysis of the interviews has highlighted some specific aspects of public spaces that seem to influence older people's perceptions of the area in negative or positive ways. Such characteristics can impact older people's everyday use of the urban environment and it is argued that similar effects may be experienced also among other age groups. Planning practice can be successful in supporting people's regular use of public places if it does not underestimate the impact of particular features of the urban landscape on individual perception and use of a place.

With regard to the negative aspects that may discourage older people's use of a public place, three issues emerge as determinant among the subjects in both cities. The first aspect is the

absence of shops in the area, the second is the apparent lack of maintenance of open spaces, and the third is the noise in public and semi-public places. The presence of shops is a key feature in supporting and facilitating the liveability of specific areas among users of such streets, as more people are wandering about with consequent tangible effects on people's perception of safety, as suggested by the examples that follow. Given the influence on safety perception, the presence of shops is important not just in the city centre as it is the case of Matthew below, but also in particularly deprived urban areas, such as neighbourhoods in Hackney where Freddie and Alexander live:

> *Matthew*: In Brighton – well, I suppose it would be the same anywhere but because I live here I notice that – there are some parts and some roads that I dislike intensely, like this is one that I dislike (he points to a narrow street in the city centre on the map). Somehow it always feels windy, and then the pavements are uneven, it's also… this particular piece, just this bit, a few hundred yards, it feels… like nowhere… When we get to the shops I find instantly is better. (70, Hove)

> *Freddie*: This used to be a Chinese restaurant but look at the following photo, it's a bullet (photos not reported here which only shows a hole in a window caused by a gunshot). Somebody had an argument, I don't know whether it was a customer or one of the Chinese and came back to visit with a bullet. For two years now has been closed. It should be reopened and let everybody else run it. (63, Hackney)

> *Alexander*: (Figure 19) You don't see people (in the surroundings around his house), and what you don't also see is the police, it's very odd vibe as a consequence… it's surprisingly quiet, it's maybe because there are no shops. (63, Hackney)

Figure 19 – Alexander's photo of unpleasant feature in his local area (absence of shops), Hackney

By taking this photo, Alexander intended to show also the poor aesthetic of the estate at the end of the street, which contributes to his perception of the area as not particularly pleasant. Another negative characteristic of some open spaces is the lack of maintenance that often leads to a sense of abandonment, especially in parks. The progressive neglect of a previously enjoyable area can be even more evident and crushing because older people recall the place in a better condition, allowing some nostalgic feelings to take over. This is what happens in Grace's case, as she commented with disapproval the process of redevelopment of a park in Brighton centre because it was left in a state of neglect:

> *Grace*: (Figure 20) It's a mess now, it is a messy, dirty, unattractive place, but as I grew up here as a child it was beautiful and covered in trees, very attractive and popular park. Then in 1987 we had a hurricane and it swept all the trees away and it's not been the same since, and that year 1987 was also the year when my daughter was born. So always when I see it I

remember what it was like until the year that my daughter was born. What they did after the storm was they concreted it all over… and I'd like to see it as it was. I understand the kids have fun with skateboards with all the concrete, but the character of this park… and the beauty of this park is that it's right in the middle of this road, in the middle of a built-up area, and now it's a messy, dirty, unattractive place. (64, Brighton)

Figure 20 – Grace's photo of unpleasant feature in her local area (neglected park), Brighton

A last recurrent issue expressed with disappointment by many participants does not relate specifically to aesthetic criteria, design or environmental qualities. Instead, it concerns the sensory experience and points to other people's behaviours. Specifically, the subjects lamented the loud noise in public places such as crowded squares or streets and semi-public places such as cafés and restaurants. A study by Phillips et al. (2013) finds similar results and stresses that sensory overload is found to impact negatively on older people's appreciation of the physical context. Older people in this research explained that the issue emerged only in recent years and it increased progressively with age, in part because of more frequent hearing problems and in part because of changes in lifestyle and preferences over the life course:

> *Stanley*: Oh I hate… nowadays I hate noise. When I was younger I used to like going and joining things and music festivals and things like that… I just prefer to be in quiet places now really. I mean, I think my best mates we kind of evolved together, neither of us like noisy places anymore. (81, Brighton)
>
> *Luke*: A lot of office groups come here (snooker club) and have parties and drink and those sort of things, and we don't approve that (Luke and his friends), and they now play with loud music, which is not great neither. (62, Hackney)
>
> *Max*: This café hasn't been open very long, 6 months, I like the design, I like the food, I like the feeling of friendliness. There's no music so I can hear you and you can hear me. Usually on Saturday my partner and I meet in town, there is a café in the Pavilion upstairs which has no music, and because it's upstairs there are no babies… and it's very attractive, it looks over the gardens on the Pavilion. (69, Hove)

Participants' accounts appear to associate noise to youths, which may suggest that an enjoyable space of hospitality for an old person might not be equally enjoyable for a younger person and vice versa, with consequent impacts on the inclusiveness of some public places such as cafés and restaurants and their potential in fostering intergenerational encounters.[16] However, this is a misleading and ageist assumption since younger people do not necessarily prefer noisy places to quiet ones. In addition, informants' narratives reveal that according to the situation and the ambience of the place people experience noise in different ways, and the same person who may not enjoy a specific loud place may enjoy a different but equally loud one. For example, Luke said explicitly that he does not like the snooker club the same way he did years back because the atmosphere has changed since youths and younger adults started frequenting the club. The sense of belonging to the place has a role in his reaction to new users' appropriation of space. On the other hand, he sounded enthusiastic about the noise of the open space around King' Cross, one of the busiest stations in London, because of the overwhelming vibe and the perception of being part of the world:

16. Spaces of hospitality are commercial sites that offer food and drinks, e.g. restaurants and cafés (see Bell 2007).

> *Luke*: The noise of the station, it's a bit of a shock, out there seems almost in the country and suddenly you come into this station and there are millions of commuters and workers and… (smiles) God it's another lifestyle! (62, Hackney)

Another example is provided by Penelope. She expressed a preference for quiet places but she was aware that the noise and busyness of the urban life attract her because they symbolise the liveliness of the area and the availability of recreational and cultural opportunities:

> *Penelope*: We've thought sometimes to retire and go to a quieter place, but then I think how are we going to go to the theatre or to the cinema? I'd rather be in a noisy environment… We live in a quiet area. (64, Brighton)

In contrast to less appreciated urban qualities, older people took photos also of features that they particularly like and that enhance their outdoor experience. Out of 20 photos portraying pleasant features, 13 are of natural elements photographed by ten participants and they show water, green spots, parks, flowers and trees (Figure 21). 6 photos represent appreciated architectural elements such as suggestive roads, colourful graffiti and welcoming shopping streets (Figure 22). One person took a photo of a group of mothers with their children crossing a street, whose presence emanate a sense of safety, liveability and sociability of the place (Figure 23). Indeed, the high number of natural elements captured in the pictures reflects the invaluable influence and restorative effect of nature on older people's wellbeing. In both localities, people are pleased to see areas with flowers along streets, in squares or at the entrance of shops because it contributes to perceiving the environment as looked after. It is also common to identify water as a very pleasant feature, in any forms such as fountains, canals and rivers. However, older people do not appear to value nature over the built environment; instead, they appreciate their merging together. Likeable urban details appear in some people's photos, meaning that the urban is not necessarily perceived as unpleasant but that some aspects of it can have a positive influence on people's perceptions of the area, as observed in Chapter 5 (p.155). Specifically, several people appreciate street art when it enhances unattractive public infrastructures such as in Max's photo (Figure 18, B). Moreover, older people enjoy open spaces that provide shops, pedestrianised areas and cafés with outdoor seating because these elements enhance the liveability and vibrancy of the place with consequent benefits on perceived safety. As an example, the space in Figure 22 C portrays George Street, which is the main shopping street in Hove that has been recently redeveloped

and transformed into a completely pedestrianised area, whereas before it was a street open to vehicles. The redevelopment of the street has been approved enthusiastically by all Hove residents in the sample, to whom George Street (Figure 22 C) has now become an icon of pedestrian-friendly urban redevelopment.

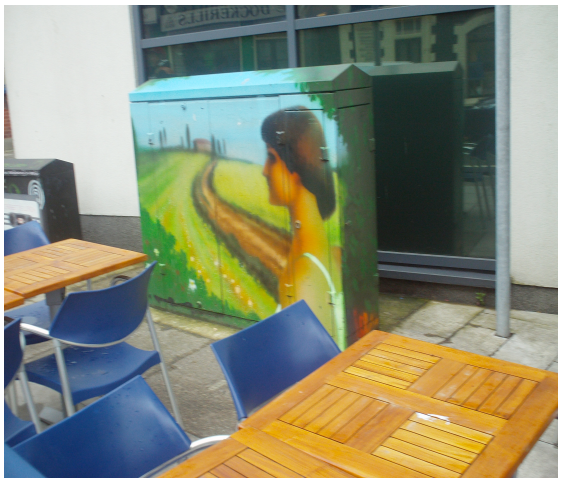
Figure 21– Alice's (Hackney, A) and Iris's (Brighton, B) photos of pleasant features

A

B

Figure 22 – Chloe's (Hackney, A), Max's (Hove, B) and Eve's (Hove, C) photos of pleasant features

A



B

C

Figure 23 – Benjamin's photo of pleasant features in his local area (Hackney)

To conclude, this chapter has explored the ways in which older people perceive and engage with the urban environment starting from their own accounts. The discussion on the interplay between physical features and sociability of places has highlighted that urban design affects older people's overall experiences of places, it influences the likelihood of enjoying the outing experience and it assists psychological wellbeing. Although older people may not consciously recognise design as a relevant factor in their everyday social experiences, they express preferences for places that are lively and with a variety of things to see and to do, indirectly referring to the social characteristics that contribute to define public spaces. This finding is important because it reinforces the argument emerged in Chapter 4 that older people enjoy living in a vibrant, resourceful and bustling society. Indeed, underlying this finding is the consideration that older people seem to desire and prefer the same things as other sectors of the population. Also, it suggests that older people may even welcome the physical and social transformation of their neighbourhoods. Hence, older people should not be considered a priori as any different from other groups of the population purely on the basis of age. The chapter has discussed also the functional and social role of public places, stressing the need for urban planning to think of ways to create areas that mix such places in balanced measure. Moreover, the significance attached to specific local places frequented by older people on a regular basis has been highlighted in this chapter. In particular, places like greengrocers, post

offices and other local stores should be available and easily accessible within the urban fabric. Also the presence of welcoming and attractive libraries, cafés and other facilities that support sociability is considered as highly important. The offer of shops, quiet places and the regular maintenance of public spaces positively influence the quality of the outdoor experience and the liveability and liveliness of a place. A last important finding of the research is that older people appreciate the blending together of natural and built environmental elements in the urban landscape. Urban planning might need to consider effective ways to support such coexistence and invest on the maintenance of natural elements. Overall, the analysis of the data has demonstrated that urban areas constitute an invaluable resource in older people's everyday life by performing inspirational, social and restorative functions. The availability of a wide range of activities, easily accessible facilities and the appearance and atmosphere of public places impact tangibly older people's psychological and physical wellbeing.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions

Overview of the research findings

The aim of this study was the examination of older people's everyday sociability in urban public spaces, with particular attention paid to those unstructured social encounters occurring within the spaces that frame older urbanites' day-to-day life. During the course of the research, mobility issues emerged as closely interrelated with sociability. Therefore, such themes were developed in connection to each other and to considerations around everyday life in the urban environment.

Overall, the main contribution of this thesis is the recognition of the need to question general assumptions around older people and their experiences of the urban environment. Indeed, the findings clearly oppose a negative interpretation of cities as detrimental to older people's quality of life. The vast majority of participants described themselves as happy to live in an urban setting and they did not plan to leave it. Furthermore, nobody expressed the feeling of being trapped in the city and by the urban decay of some areas, contrary to considerations by Scharf et al. (2005) recorded in deprived UK urban contexts. This research demonstrates that many older people enjoy the availability of socio-recreational opportunities and accessible everyday services. These results show that urban spaces have the potential to support older people's wellbeing. Significantly, it is found also that older people do not necessarily limit their spatial worlds to the local surroundings around the home or the neighbourhood. A related key conclusion is that older people in relatively good health express similar necessities and preferences to anyone else for what concerns their everyday life in the city. Indeed, also the analysis of the data on sociability demonstrates that people's desire of socially interacting outdoors depends more on personal circumstances and attitude rather than on age. Hence, it is argued that age should not be the only or most significant factor in determining the ways in which researchers, planners and members of the public might think of older people. There is a need to recognise and challenge preconceptions about the everyday life of the older population in policy and research that engages with issues of urban ageing. The findings of this research break clichés about later life and in particular they shed new

light on the links between older people and urban environments. This thesis does not contend that urban environments are necessarily more advantageous than less urbanised settings. Instead, it emphasises the importance of developing nuanced understandings of the relationship between wellbeing in later life and the urban realm that are less centred on a negative conceptualisation of the latter. Related to this, a significant contribution of this thesis is the introduction of a new perspective on the meaning of *therapeutic landscapes*. As Chapter 5 demonstrated, relaxation, invigoration and excitement are not specific only of natural settings within the urban context, such as parks, community allotments, and the seaside in Brighton & Hove, which interestingly is disregarded by the majority of older people involved in this study. In fact, some participants depicted a more nuanced picture of urban places that questioned the common association between natural environment and relaxation on one hand, and urban environment and anxiety on the other. To some participants, urban places such as markets, lively cultural quarters, streets and shopping areas arouse similar positive emotions to natural settings. As Zoe's example (p.155) showed, even supposedly daunting places such as narrow and dark alleyways can be a source of pleasant sensations and excitement. These considerations challenge assumptions around older people and weaken rigid definitions of the attributes that may identify natural environments as opposed to urban ones.

The remaining part of this section summarises the central findings and relates them to the initial research questions. With regard to the first research question, the analysis of the qualitative data reveals that informants interpret and react to outdoor sociability in different ways. This emphasises the need among researchers to avoid considering older people as a homogenous group about which the positive influence of outdoor social interactions on wellbeing might be automatically assumed (cf. Day, 2008; Gardner, 2011; Green et al, 2013). Chapter 5 discussed the nuanced meanings given by the subjects to outdoor social interactions, which are not always necessarily positive and which are found to vary according to the person and the circumstances. The everyday outings of many research participants are enhanced by opportunities to experience unplanned social occasions, because these enable them to feel part of modern society and to see what goes on in the world. This enrichment of the person's outing appears to be spurred both by chance encounters that entail direct interaction (e.g., chats with shopkeepers or other users of the same space) and by other undemanding forms of sociability (e.g., the pleasure of spending time alone and yet enjoying the passive company of strangers who are sharing the same environment). The primary data

indicate that older people do not purposely go out with the intention of socially interacting with others. However, social interactions play an important role at a less conscious level. The data underline also that the presence of others in public spaces is very important in enhancing the quality of the outdoor experience and older people's wellbeing. First of all, the presence of other people in a public space increases the vitality of the environment, and second it supports indirectly older people's outings – especially the more frail participants – by providing psychological support (e.g., seeing "respectable" people encourages individuals' sense of safety) and physical support (e.g., if anything would happen, there would be people who might be able to assist the old person). In addition, sociability appears as an important mean of developing friendships, and many respondents claimed to be more involved in physical and non-physical leisure activities compared to how they used to during working life.

Older people's narratives suggest that another form of social interaction that occurs in the public realm is experienced as ageist attitudes towards older people, which relates to the second research question. Chapter 5 demonstrated that there are different ways in which older people might react to ageist stereotypes and stigmas that are reproduced through specific behaviours in the public spaces of the city. In some cases older people embody those behaviours in a submissive way, by assimilating their own self to the negative stereotypes and thus considering as natural those interactions that are characterised by ageist stigmas. However, in other cases ageist attitudes are reinterpreted intentionally and strategically as an advantage, as those subjects who admitted to play the role of the *old person* exemplify. This reaction to ageism manifested especially among those older people who do not feel that they entirely reflect the negative aspects associated with old age. In the sample of this research, older people with a positive attitude to life did not claim to feel discriminated against by others in public spaces and they did not seem to be suffering any ageist behaviours on a regular basis, reflecting the concept of *senior coolness* advanced by Zimmermann and Grebe (2014). Therefore, ageism does not appear to be endemic and institutionalised such as that contended by Biggs and Tinker (2007). A further form of social interaction that spurs from the ageist attitudes experienced in public spaces manifests through older people's willingness to reaffirm their position in society as valuable customers and respectable citizens. Such interaction is characterised by the resistance to age discrimination and is expressed in older people's trenchant comments and behaviours directed to the discriminating person, as the examples of a few older women illustrated in Chapter 5.

With regard to the third research question concerning the extent to which age determines older people's social interactions and mobility patterns, the findings described in Chapter 4 suggest that age per se is not as relevant as it might be expected. Instead, personal attitude and interests emerge as the most significant factors influencing the likelihood of getting outdoors, the time spent outside, the distance covered, and also the quality of social interactions experienced in the public places of the city. In other words, this research does not support the view that a decrease of overall mobility activity might occur necessarily in later life (see Mollenkopf et al. 2007). In addition, it contrasts the assumption that older people might experience inevitably less outdoor social interactions than younger age groups purely on the basis of age.

The fourth research question was addressed in Chapter 6, which investigated the extent to which the space appears to mediate social encounters by enhancing or discouraging older people's sociability. The data do not support a clear relationship between the design of city's public spaces and the degree and quality of social interactions experienced by the older population. In other words, on one hand the research subjects reported that pleasant spaces can indeed improve their outing experiences and they encourage them to wander about and linger, but on the other hand they did not relate the design of such spaces to enhanced or undermined sociability. However, the possibility that the informants overlooked the relationship between design and sociability because of difficulties in reflecting on potential connections was discussed as highly probable in the chapter. In addition, the study finds that older people's tastes concerning a variety of public spaces such as rejuvenated marketplaces, shopping centres and commercial areas, newly designed cafés and restaurant companies cannot be systematically related to age. In other words, subjects throughout the age groups expressed preferences for the aesthetics of public spaces that may not be usually associated with older people. While age does not seem to determine mobility patterns and social practices to a significant extent, it emerges as significant in reducing gender differences with regard to safety concerns (see Chapter 5) and shopping practices (see Chapter 6).

Implications of the research

This study presents some wider implications beyond advancing geographical and gerontological understandings of ageing. Firstly, it stresses the significance of participatory planning practices that consult older people in processes of urban redevelopment and regeneration of public spaces. Involving older people is important because it can help nurture their sense of belonging and attachment to the transformed area. In so doing, participatory planning may assist in reducing potential feelings of unfamiliarity and detachment that may be more likely to result from top-down planning processes. Older people's involvement is important for another reason. As outlined in the review of the multi-disciplinary literature, policymakers and planners claim to be committed to create inclusive public spaces for all. However, to achieve this they may rely on general frameworks and common assumptions about older people. Rather than stemming from intentional neglect of planners and policymakers, such a generalising approach may depend on their difficulties in understanding and translating into practice the multi-faceted reality of the ageing process (Hockey et al. 2013). On the other hand, research can assist policymaking by offering nuanced insights into older people's lives that emerge from direct observation and interviewing. As noticed in the literature, research shows that sociability, attractiveness and inclusiveness of a place may have different meanings for an old person and a planner or policymaker. In other words, it is important to learn from older people's experiences when formulating policy about sustainable communities and about social inclusion through design, because this may bring to surface unexpected preferences and opinions amongst the older population.

For example, we have seen that respondents in their 60s enjoy specific regenerated marketplaces in Hackney, implying that the tastes of older people, younger adults and younger people could possibly be more alike than it might be assumed. It is important to understand whether and how individuals' preferences change among age groups in later life and the ways in which age actually influences such preferences. Indeed, there is a need among planners and policymakers to reflect critically on their approach to old age within planning practices, since the tastes usually associated with old age may have changed over the last decade to become less distinguishable from those of other age groups.

A second example provides further scope for reflection to urban planners. Specifically, the importance of planning public and semi-public spaces that allow older citizens to be alone and

yet surrounded by other people who share the same space. Such places should encourage and support individuals' need for solitude, isolation and reflection while discouraging the perception of being "the odd one out", as expressed by a Hackney participant in regard to his experience of walking alone in a green park (see p.151). In addition, it would be important to reflect on the opportunities to create freely accessible public and semi-public facilities, such as the roof garden described by another subject (p.150), because economic concerns may limit older people's possibilities to visit places beyond their home and neighbourhood area.

Furthermore, lively urban spaces that present a variety of stores, colours, peculiar attractive areas and that are frequented by different people have been recognised in the study as more appealing to older people. One central feature of such heterogenic liveliness is that it enables older people to experience sociability in indirect ways simply by being surrounded by other people and by looking at what is going on in the city. The redevelopment of public spaces with older people in mind would be beneficial to all age groups, because improved accessibility, liveliness and safety indeed enhance anyone's experience of the public realm. If public places are planned to be socially sustainable in the long-term – and therefore bring people to the streets and enhance the occasions for intergenerational encounters – attention should be paid to those structural elements that attract people of any age group. These include pleasant and looked-after local businesses, areas that allow for temporary and permanent art or other artistic performances, and other features that promote liveliness and therefore create welcoming and pleasant atmospheres, in line with Peattie's description of the "convivial city" (1998). In turn, these ambiences may encourage the development of a sense of community and social cohesion among the residents, or at least the feeling of being in a pleasant people-oriented urban space.

Lastly, this section highlights some implications for those local businesses where older people are not the specific target market but that nonetheless are frequented by the older citizens (e.g., cafés, post offices, general stores, greengrocers, supermarkets). In light of the discussion in Chapter 5 on the influence of ageist attitudes on older people's social interactions in public and semi-public places, it may be advantageous for some businesses to consider critically the ways in which their personnel approach older customers. This is important because the data suggest that even polite attitudes and gentle gestures by the staff in public facilities could put the old person in an uncomfortable position. These brief but regular interactions may impact in negative ways the subsequent use of the same place by the old person. Reflecting on the

social interactions between the worker and the old customer may not just enhance older people's social experiences in those premises, but it may assist the economic activity of the business by ensuring the continuity of visits by the older customers.

Limitations of the research

In order to interpret correctly the data collected and to identify possibilities for further research it is necessary to recognise the methodological limitations of the study. The first limitation concerns the short time-span over which subjects were observed. This limitation arises from time constraints and the individual nature of this research project. This means that the data can only be representative of an ordinary week and the results of the "weekly-charts" should not be interpreted as a year-round picture of older people's everyday life outdoors. To make the data as representative as possible, the research subjects were asked to begin the process during a week in which they expected to undertake ordinary activities and routines. Asking participants to record a period longer than one week may have been too demanding and therefore it was decided that one week would have represented a sufficiently long period of time to collect significant information on older people's patterns of mobility and places visited.

Indeed, the situatedness of the research findings must be acknowledged, since they relate to data collected in specific spatial and temporal contexts (i.e., two British urban settings during the years of 2012 and 2013). Although the results around issues of sociability, mobility, safety, active ageing and ageism are situated within particular contexts, they have the potential to inform us about the everyday lives of older people in other urban areas. For example, it might be argued that similarities may be found if we looked at the sociability of older people in other London boroughs with analogue characteristics such as deprivation levels (e.g., Tower Hamlets), or that similarities in mobility patterns may occur in other large conurbations located near the sea (e.g., Plymouth, 79.29 km^2).

Moreover, technical limitations emerged with regard to the use of GPS units, cameras and the undertaking of go-alongs. Concerning GPS units, the most significant limitation was the frequent need to change batteries, as many subjects forgot to do so when required. However, future research may prevent this with the use of different portable GPS devices that do not

require to change battery or that at least allow longer battery life. With regard to digital cameras, screen and button represented the main issue, with the former being described by several informants as quite small and the latter as hard to press. From these considerations it appears that future research with older people that wants to engage with mobile and visual methods might need to consider immediacy and ease as the core criteria in the selection of the devices that will be used for the study. Go-alongs presented a different technical limitation, i.e. the microphone did not always record the conversations completely or perfectly.

Lastly, the methodological chapter has discussed some conceptual limitations regarding the go-alongs. One limitation is that although go-alongs are often described in the literature as effective in grasping a more accurate and valid understanding of ordinary practices by embedding everyday activities in space and time, this study finds that the contrived nature of the method automatically prevents the researcher from observing phenomena in their natural development. In addition, the validity of the data gathered does not appear to be of a superior kind in comparison to other methods of research such as face-to-face interviews. Lastly, Chapter 3 underlined that several participants experienced difficulties when prompted by the researcher to talk about the local area and their everyday places. In other words, it was not always immediate and spontaneous for older people to articulate narratives about their everyday life in the city spaces even while walking in their areas and using the environment as a prompt for discussion.

Opportunities for future research

This final section highlights the gaps in geographical and gerontological studies on ageing as they have been identified during the phase of data analysis, and in so doing it provides suggestions for future research.

First of all, it is suggested that research on outdoor sociability in later life may investigate how social interactions unfold in rural environments as opposed to urban areas. This study has demonstrated that older people indeed enjoy living in rather vibrant, cosmopolitan and youthful societies. Urban areas offer opportunities to be active and engaged, to meet people and feel part of an exciting society, and these opportunities are valued among the respondents. Conurbations also provide overall effective and accessible public transport

choices, which reduce the need for driving. In light of these considerations, interesting questions might be asked about the everyday life of older people in rural places. For example, future studies might investigate the meanings attributed to sociability among older people in villages, the ways in which older people in rural areas are engaged in public places compared to older people in urban areas, the travel distances they might need to travel to satisfy physical and social needs, the ways in which issues of safety and ageism influence everyday life in low-density areas.

Secondly, the ways in which sociability is experienced among groups of older people with different ethnic backgrounds was not a specific focus of this research. However, it is an issue of extreme importance given the ethnic mix that characterises the older populations of metropolitan areas, which indeed will increase in the next few decades, as the younger generations grow older. Social interactions outdoors may not be perceived and interpreted in the same way among different cultural groups, and different perceptions of sociability may result in the social exclusion of some older people from certain public or semi-public spaces. Hence, it would be important to undertake further research focusing specifically on ethnic background to understand how outdoor sociability, casual encounters and interaction in the public realm are experienced by the older people of varied ethnic groups.

In addition, Chapter 6 stressed that older people enjoy regenerated areas. In Hackney in particular we have seen that people in their 60s appreciate rejuvenated markets. However, the data available for this research do not let us examine this finding further to investigate the tastes and preferences for redeveloped areas among older people in their 70s or 80s. This research argues that more research on this issue might reveal the extent to which age is an influential factor in determining individuals' preferences for physical features of the public realm specifically in regenerated urban areas. Such analysis may also challenge stereotypical preconceptions about aesthetic taste in old age and about preferences of public places visited among older people. As a consequence, the findings would assist design and policymaking concerned with the regeneration of particular urban areas that aim to be socially inclusive and sustainable.

Another gap that might be filled by further research emerged in Chapter 5 in the discussion of ageist behaviours that can be experienced in public places. More precisely, no in-depth research has been undertaken with regard to how the public reacts to older people in those places where interactions for services or commercial transactions take place. The examination

of staff's behaviours towards old customers, their concerns (or lack of concerns) about the best ways to treat older people might be combined with investigations of older people's reactions to staff's attitudes in a variety of public and privately owned public places. This study has started to shed some light on how the transactions between older people and service providers unfold. For example, in Chapter 5 we saw that neglectful behaviours of a bartender and a chemist had a strong impact on two older women's confidence and perception of self. These examples clearly demonstrate that further research on such transactions would benefit our understanding of the everyday lives of older people in urban areas. A deeper analysis on such issue may inform future policies such as employees' trainings and codes of conduct, and it would expand our knowledge on the ways in which ageism manifests in those public places accessed regularly in older people's day-to-day life.

In Chapters 4 and 5 emerged also that ageing studies have not paid yet significant attention to cycling for pleasure or for necessity among people aged 60 and over. However, in light of the importance given to health activities among the research subjects, it is argued that more research on cycling in old age might be a significant field of further research. It is also reasonable to expect that the investigation may be of interest to a variety of disciplines. For example, studies in gerontology may relate cycling to active ageing; works in geography may look at spatial cycling patterns and cycling practices possibly with implication also for road traffic policy; research in fashion may look at ways to develop comfortable cycling clothing for older men and women.

Finally, in relation to previous considerations on the meanings of *therapeutic landscapes*, it is argued that further research should address the potential changes in older people's perceptions of seaside cities and towns. Indeed, Chapter 4 stressed that older people in Hackney did not express the desire to move to seaside environments and they appeared not to attribute a particular significance to being near the sea. Similarly, the majority of those in Brighton & Hove claimed not to go to the seafront or to rarely go for a walk. In support to participants' narratives of neglect, the GPS records representing the 25 residents of Brighton & Hove showed little movements on the promenade. It may be worth understanding whether this tendency is reproduced also in other seaside conurbations and what are the reasons for the overall disinterest in being near the sea.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 – Product information for GPS and digital camera

GPS-CS3KA, 2009 Sony Corporation (The above images are publicly available on the web)

The GPS unit works with 2 AA batteries at the time; battery life changes according to the operation and the environmental condition. The GPS records positioning information about every 15 seconds and it may take up to a few minutes to connect to the radio signals from the GPS satellites when switching on the unit (the status 'searching' is displayed until the positional information is obtained).

Bloggie MHS-PM5/PM5K, Mobile HD Snap Camera, 2010 Sony Corporation

The camera is provided with a rechargeable battery; battery life lasts normally over a week. USB connection support cable for connection to a computer. It has also a video-recording option.

The photo below shows two participants carrying the GPS around their necks; the woman is holding the camera in one hand while the man is holding the voice recorder with the lapel microphone used to record go-alongs.

Appendix 2 - Information sheet and consent form

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Later life in public spaces: investigating the social experiences of older people in the built environment

Dear Sir/Madam

I am asking if you would help me with a study that investigates how welcoming, enjoyable and attractive towns and public spaces are, and it explores the effectiveness of those environments in meeting the needs of an ageing population. In my research I am looking into the social experiences that influence older people's quality of life in outdoor public spaces. These places include local shops, cafes, libraries, parks, and the variety of leisure facilities. For instance, I would like to know about your experiences of going for shopping, for a walk, or of spending some time at a cafe. In so doing, I would like to understand also whether and how personal confidence and motivation in getting around change over the years, and which features of the environment influence the quality of older people's experiences outdoors.

Here is what I would ask you to do for **one week** (7 consecutive days):

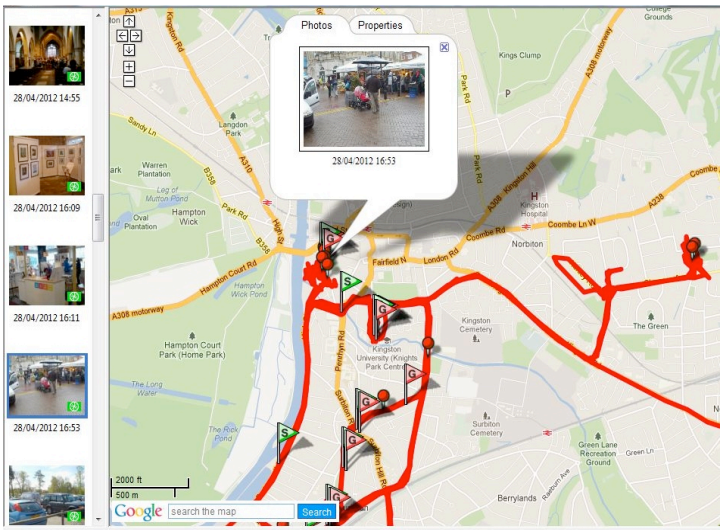
to **carry a digital camera during your ordinary, daily journeys**. I would like you to take some pictures of places outdoors that are meaningful to you and where you feel happy or unhappy. Public spaces include shops, cafés, community centres, fast foods, theatres, malls, markets, squares, parks, and so on. They can be places that you access regularly but also places that you visit only once, thus they can either be familiar or unfamiliar. They do not include family and friends' houses or private garden. The camera is provided by the University.

1) to **carry a pocket-size electronic device called GPS, which is lightweight and easy to operate**. The GPS will record your journeys, and then I will transfer the records on my personal computer. Your tracks will be shown as lines on a map on my computer, and the objective of this process is to understand how older people move in the built environment. The GPS will be provided by Kingston University and it will be shown to you how to use it. You can contact me at any time if you experience any problems. During the week I **would like to accompany you once during your ordinary journeys for a few hours** if this is OK with you, so that we can chat about your everyday life.

2) After this week, I will collect the camera and the GPS and I would like you to talk me through your pictures and your experiences of going out and about. I would also bring my personal computer with me so that I can show you how the journeys you recorded with the GPS appear on the computer. The

interview could take place in a place where you feel comfortable, for instance your home or your favourite café. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview we will move on to other questions. I will ask your permission to digitally record the interview so I can fully record your thoughts, but you will not be identified by your name. The records will be kept in my personal computer, which can only be accessed by me. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except my supervisory team (Prof. Nigel Walford, Dr. Jennie Middleton, Dr. Katherine Eames, and Ann Hockey) will have access to it. All information we gain from you will be maintained in a strictly confidential manner. All raw data will be stored for 5 years after completion of the PhD thesis and then destroyed. In the reporting of the project, no information will be released which will enable the reader to identify who the respondent was.

The picture below shows how I will create a map on my computer with your GPS tracks and the photos. This image comes from a participant who took part in the pilot study in Kingston upon Thames in April 2012. GPS tracks are not extremely detailed, so I will not be able to see exactly every place you go to. In fact, we will use the tracks and photos only as a prompt to talk about your experiences during the week.



We will arrange a week for you to take part according to your availability. **During the week of work I would like to come with you one morning/afternoon during one of your ordinary journeys outdoors**. This would allow you to inform me about any problem with the equipment or any other research-related issue and to discuss informally about your experiences of navigating the outdoor environment.

Please note: I AM INTERESTED IN ORDINARY ACTIVITIES AND I AM ASKING YOU NOT TO ALTER YOUR ORDINARY BEHAVIOURS DURING THE WEEK AND DURING OUR TIME SPENT TOGETHER.

I hope you will enjoy the process with the knowledge that your participation will help to further the understanding of how to create more inclusive and enjoyable public spaces.

CONSENT FORM

Written consent to participate in the research study:

LATER LIFE AND PUBLIC SPACES: INVESTIGATING THE SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF OLDER PEOPLE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Statement by participant

- I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for this study.
- I have been informed of the purpose, risks, and benefits of taking part.
- I understand what my involvement will entail and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and that I can withdraw at any time without prejudice.
- I understand that all information obtained will be confidential and that my responses will be made anonymous before analysis.
- I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided that I cannot be identified as a subject.
- Contact information has been provided should I wish to seek further information from the investigator at any time for purposes of clarification.

Name of participant _____

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

Statement by investigator

- I have explained this project and the implications of participation in it to this participant without bias and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

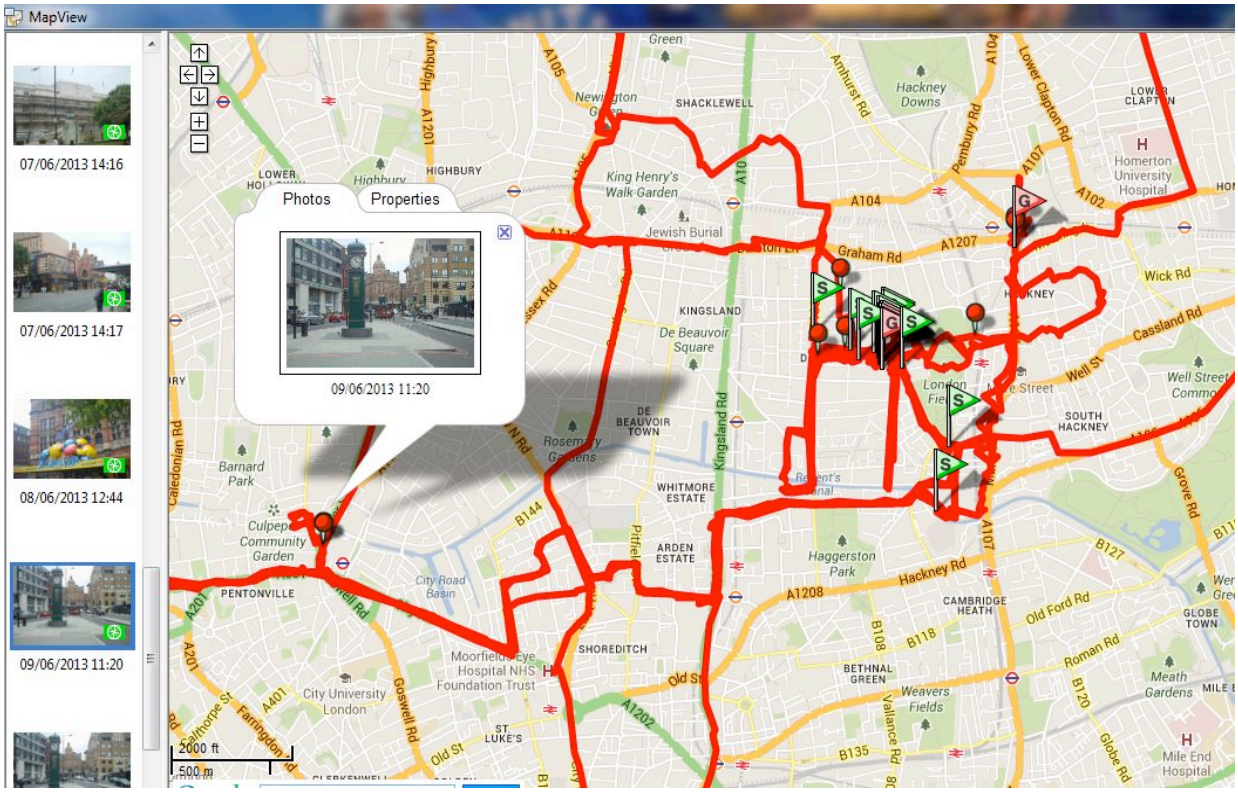
Name of investigator _____

Signature of investigator _____

Date _____

If you would like to receive a copy of the results when they are published, please provide your email address below (or home address if you prefer to receive a paper copy). My email/home address is: _____

Appendix 3 – Visualising GPS track logs with photos



This image is an example of how the researcher and the participants looked at the individuals' mobility patterns combined with the photos during in-depth interviews. The red lines represent a person's track log and the red circles represent photos taken in the specific geographic location. By clicking on the red circle, the photo pops up and provides exact date and time information. The list of photos taken by the subject is also displayed on the left side of the screen and the photos can be visualised by scrolling up and down.

Appendix 4 – Interview questions

OUTDOOR SPACES

1. How often do you go outdoors over an ordinary week?
2. What sorts of places do you like to see and visit?
3. Are you usually accompanied by someone?
4. How often do you spend time with others who have the same interests as you?
5. In what types of places do you like to stop for a drink or a meal?
6. Are there particular situations that make you feel anxious when you go out and about?
7. Are there particular places where you do not feel comfortable in going to? Why?
8. Is it important for you to meet people and to see people around when you go out?
9. Do you normally feel comfortable in dealing with members of staff in shops and other facilities? Do you think that members of staff take into consideration a person's age when serving a customer?

PERCEPTION OF SELF

10. Has your confidence in going out and about changed over the life course? How does it affect your experiences of getting outdoors?
11. Have your social contacts diminished over the years?
12. Do you think you are more, same or less sociable than you were in the past?
13. Do you think that your bodily appearance impacts the ways you interact with other people? Does it impact the ways other people interact with you?
14. Do you have a positive attitude toward yourself?
15. Do you feel tired after a day or a few hours out and about?

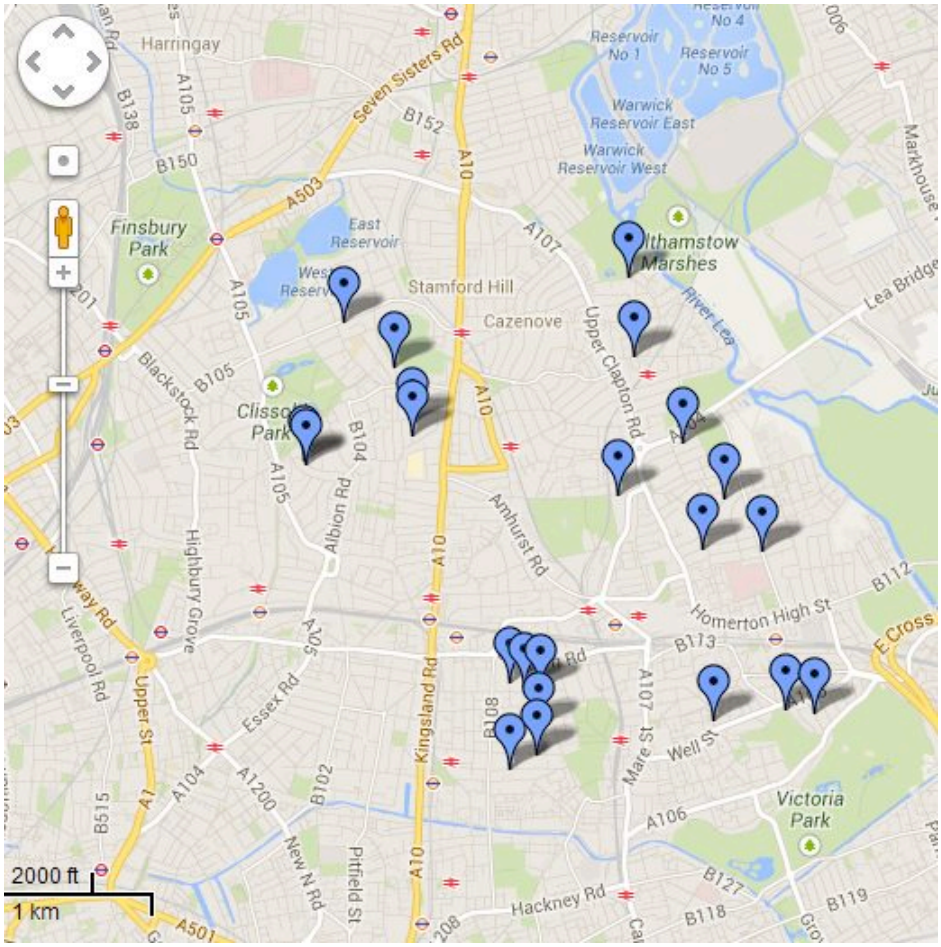
URBAN/RURAL AND QUALITY OF LIFE

16. How do you find living in a town, in an urban area? Do you feel you belong to this place?
17. Tell me about Hackney/Brighton, what do you like and don't like about living here and how the area does affect your social life?
18. What do you think is most important to determine good quality of life?

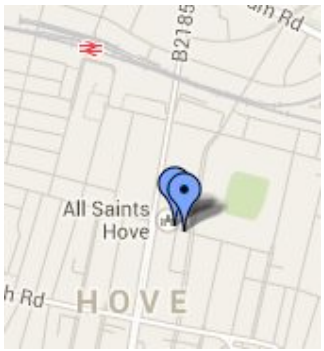
TECHNOLOGY

19. Do you use self check outs at shops? How do you find using them?
20. Are there other technologies that you use especially outdoors? E.g., cash withdrawal, card payment, electronic tickets at stations, online bookings for theatre or museums etc.
21. Are you interested in these kinds of new technologies?

Appendix 5 – Geographical distribution of participants' residence



Only 22 residences have been marked in the map because 3 married couples participated at the study, hence 3 participants lived at the same address of their partners.



Zoom in on two overlapping households

Only 21 residences have been marked in the map because 3 married couples participated at the study, hence 3 participants lived at the same address of their partners. In addition, 1 participant did not disclose address information, however he claimed to be living on the border between Brighton and Hove.

Appendix 6 – Survey sheets (personal information and weekly charts)

Structure of the survey drawn from the OPUS project questionnaire (Phillips et al., 2010)

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Female

2. What is your year of birth? _____

3. Where were you born? _____

4. For how many years have you lived at your present address? _____

5. For how many years have you lived in this area? _____

6. In what type of residence do you currently live?
   - ☐ Private detached house
   - ☐ Semi-detached house
   - ☐ Private flat/apartment
   - ☐ Retirement village
   - ☐ Hostel (assisted living)
   - ☐ Nursing home
   - ☐ Terraced house
   - ☐ Other? (please describe) _____

7. What is the tenancy arrangement of the residence where you currently live?
   - ☐ Owner Occupier
   - ☐ Private rental (less than one year)
   - ☐ Long term lease (more than 1 year)
   - ☐ Other? (please describe) _____

8. Do you live by yourself?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

9. If no, with whom do you live? _____

10. Do you have children/relatives?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

11. If yes, what is the relationship (e.g. children, grandchildren) and where do they live? (please specify area/town and miles if possible)

    _____

12. Do you see them?
    - ☐ Yes, every week
    - ☐ Yes, a few times every one or two months
    - ☐ Yes, only a few times per year
    - ☐ No, never

13. What is your marital status?
    - ☐ Single
    - ☐ Married / Civil Partnership
    - ☐ Divorced / Separated
    - ☐ Widowed

14. What level of education have you achieved?
    - ☐ No schooling
    - ☐ Attended primary school, left at age 11 or under
    - ☐ Attended primary and secondary school and left age 14-16
    - ☐ Stayed at school for the sixth form and left at age 18
    - ☐ Underwent a day release course leading to a vocational qualification
    - ☐ Attended college full time to study for a vocational qualification
    - ☐ Studied for and obtained a Bachelor degree
    - ☐ Studied for and obtained a Masters or PhD
    - ☐ Other? (please describe) _____

15. Are you currently working?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No, I am unemployed
    - ☐ No, I am retired

16. If yes, what job is it? _____
    Is it part time\full time\voluntary? _____

17. What was your job before you retired or became unemployed?

    _____

18. To which of these groups do you consider that you belong?
    - ☐ Welsh
    - ☐ English
    - ☐ Scottish
    - ☐ Irish
    - ☐ Other White (please describe) _____
    - ☐ Indian

- ☐ Pakistani
- ☐ Bangladeshi
- ☐ Chinese
- ☐ Other Asian (please describe) _____
- ☐ Caribbean
- ☐ African
- ☐ Arabian
- ☐ Other Black (please describe) _____
- ☐ Mixed (White & Black Caribbean)
- ☐ Mixed (White & Black African)
- ☐ Mixed (White & Asian)
- ☐ Mixed other (please describe) _____

19. Do you have the use of a car for activities such as visiting local shops or going to the doctor?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ No license

20. Do you usually drive yourself or do you travel as a passenger?
    - ☐ Drive myself
    - ☐ Passenger
    - ☐ Varies

21. Do you have a bus pass that gives you free travel (i.e. a concessionary bus pass)?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No